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By Frank Barrett



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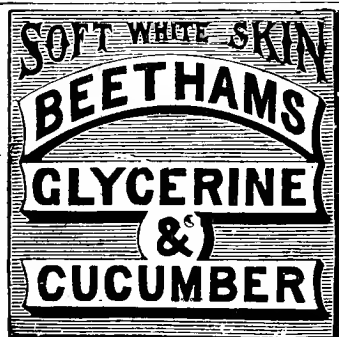
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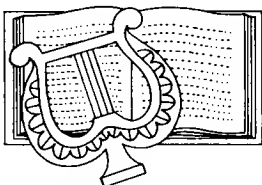
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FOUND GUILTY

A Novel

BY
FRANK BARRETT

AUTHOR OF
'POLLY MORRISON,' 'JOHN FORD,' 'HONEST DAVIE,' ETC.



A NEW EDITION

London
CHATTO & WINDUS, PICCADILLY
1892

CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. FROM THE NARRATIVE OF THE REV. DR. BULLEN -	1
II. FROM THE NARRATIVE OF DOROTHEA HOWARD	13
III. CONTINUED FROM THE NARRATIVE OF DOROTHEA HOWARD -	21
IV. FROM THE NARRATIVE OF THOMAS CRAIK	29
V. CONTINUED FROM THE NARRATIVE OF THOMAS CRAIK	37
VI. CONTINUED FROM THE NARRATIVE OF THOMAS CRAIK	47
VII. FROM THE NARRATIVE OF THE REV. DR. BULLEN -	57
VIII. FROM THE NARRATIVE OF DOROTHEA HOWARD	63
IX. CONTINUED FROM THE NARRATIVE OF DOROTHEA HOWARD	74
X. FROM THE NARRATIVE OF THE REV. DR. BULLEN	81
XI. FROM THE NARRATIVE OF THOMAS CRAIK	94
XII. FROM THE NARRATIVE OF DOROTHEA HOWARD	109
XIII. FROM THE NARRATIVE OF THE REV. DR. BULLEN	112
XIV. FROM THE NARRATIVE OF THOMAS CRAIK	120
XV. CONTINUED FROM THE NARRATIVE OF THOMAS CRAIK	130
XVI. CONTINUED FROM THE NARRATIVE OF THOMAS CRAIK	142
XVII. FROM THE NARRATIVE OF DOROTHEA HOWARD	153
XVIII. FROM THE NARRATIVE OF THOMAS CRAIK	164
XIX. CONTINUED FROM THE NARRATIVE OF THOMAS CRAIK	174
XX. FROM THE NARRATIVE OF THE REV. DR. BULLEN -	181
XXI. FROM THE NARRATIVE OF DOROTHEA BROMLEY -	191
XXII. THE NARRATIVE OF DOROTHEA BROMLEY CONTINUED	200

CHAPTER	PAGE
XXIII. THE NARRATIVE OF DOROTHEA BROMLEY CON- TINUED - -	208
XXIV. THE NARRATIVE OF DOROTHEA BROMLEY CON- TINUED - - - - -	215
XXV. THE NARRATIVE OF DOROTHEA BROMLEY CON- TINUED - -	221
XXVI. THE NARRATIVE OF DOROTHEA BROMLEY CON- TINUED -	230
XXVII. THE NARRATIVE OF DOROTHEA BROMLEY CON- TINUED -	237
XXVIII. THE NARRATIVE OF DOROTHEA BROMLEY CON- TINUED -	243
XXIX. THE NARRATIVE OF DOROTHEA BROMLEY CON- TINUED - - - - -	249
XXX. THE NARRATIVE OF DOROTHEA BROMLEY CON- TINUED - - -	254
XXXI. FROM THE NARRATIVE OF THOMAS CRAIK -	260
XXXII. THE NARRATIVE OF THOMAS CRAIK CONTINUED	273
XXXIII. THE NARRATIVE OF THOMAS CRAIK CONTINUED	282
XXXIV. THE NARRATIVE OF THOMAS CRAIK CONTINUED	292
XXXV. FROM THE NARRATIVE OF DOROTHEA BROMLEY -	298
XXXVI. THE NARRATIVE OF DOROTHEA BROMLEY CON- TINUED	306
XXXVII. THE NARRATIVE OF DOROTHEA BROMLEY CON- TINUED -	313
XXXVIII. THE NARRATIVE OF DOROTHEA BROMLEY CON- TINUED -	319
XXXIX. THE NARRATIVE OF DOROTHEA BROMLEY CON- CLUDED	326

FOUND GUILTY

CHAPTER I.

FROM THE NARRATIVE OF THE REV. DR. BULLEN.

My name is William Bullen; I am a doctor in divinity, and parson of the parish of Orwell; my age is sixty-three, and I have full possession of my faculties, thanks to Providence, which has endowed me with a robust constitution, and a moderate taste for the good things of this life. My wife has been dead twelve years, my daughters are married and gone from me, so I live in solitude, and lead a tranquil, but by no means an idle or an unhappy existence; for besides that I have in the evening to prepare my Sunday's sermon, and in the day have something like eight hundred souls to care for, scattered over a parish which I truly believe is the widest and wildest and the stoniest in this north-west country, I have a fair library of good books to dip into, and an excellent garden which I cultivate with my own hands, to my great delight—an occupation which needs no excuse, for surely there can be no purer pleasure, morally or materially, than to see the earth bearing beautiful blossoms from seed of our own setting.

In the autumn of 1883 I heard that Beauchamp Moat had been sold to Dr. Norman Norman, of London, who intended to make it his residence as soon as the repairs needed to make it habitable were completed.

Early in December I was told that the doctor and his wife had arrived, and I determined at once to visit them; for not only was it obvious that Mrs. Norman as a stranger would

be glad of my services in household matters relating to servants, tradesmen, etc., but it struck me that the doctor himself might be glad of my company in the long winter evenings, as I certainly should be of his, intellectual society in my parish being of the scarcest. So the first fine morning I rubbed up my wits, put on my best, and trudged off, forecasting the pleasant hours we might spend in discussing questions of science when the weather was not too bad to allow of visiting. The Moat lay in my parish, four ragged miles from the parsonage going over the hills, and six by the road, which is certainly the preferable way. Sorely out of breath with my rough scramble, I rang the bell at Beauchamp Moat, and while waiting for admittance had ample time to look about me.

The house stood at the foot of a hill, a hundred yards or so from the old London road. It was a fine specimen of an old fortified dwelling-house; picturesque, doubtless, but the most desolate place I have ever seen. Looking around, nothing was to be seen but the bare hills and pine woods—no house nor sign of living creature. The deserted road—now no more than a grass-grown alley through the woods, the new road having diverted all traffic—lent additional solitude to the old house, which bore evidence of neglect and abandonment.

An empty moat surrounded the quadrangular building, and was crossed by a crumbling bridge, in which straggling briars and trailing brambles had taken root. One side of the house was little better than a ruin; the roof had fallen in here and there, and the walls seemed to be supported by the gigantic ivy which covered them from basement to gable. The three remaining sides of the quadrangle had been better preserved; fresh pointing in the old, worn bricks showed where the ivy had been; some new tiles were conspicuous by contrast with the old in the long, sloping roof overgrown with moss and house-leek. The upper story overhung the lower in the Early English style; the leaden-latticed windows were long, narrow, and irregular. The bridge led to a gateway pierced in the side of the house; through the opening I saw the courtyard within the quadrangle covered with a rank growth of weeds and nettles; a poppy with brown seed-pods on the rigid stem stood in the mouldering brickwork of a sundial.

But for some cotton blinds in one or two of the windows I should have thought the house still uninhabited ; so lifeless and silent it was, I could hear the ' pat-pat ' of the water falling from the eaves upon the sodden leaves in the moat. The doctor and his wife must have stout hearts, thought I, to come here at such a season to live. And I imagined how weird and ghostly it would look when the mist settled in the valley, how dismal it would be in the night when rain pattered against the windows and the wind sighed and moaned in the fir-trees ; how terrifying when the gale shook the old windows, rattling the loose panes in the leaden sashes, and strange sounds came from the ruined wing, as a tile dropped upon the rotting floors within, or a loose timber creaked under the weight of the twining ivy.

I was about to ring again, when a sallow young woman came through the gateway, her sleeves tucked up, and wiping her wet hands on her coarse apron. She came to the little wicket that barred the bridge, and, as she merely shook her head, pointing to the house, I concluded that she was a deaf-mute. Understanding the manual alphabet, I asked her for her mistress with my fingers.

' Out,' she replied, by the same means.

' Has she gone to Barstow or Lipley?' I asked.

' Neither,' she replied.

Concluding that the doctor and his wife had merely gone for a walk, and feeling that a short rest would do me no harm, I told her I would step in and wait until her mistress returned. She hesitated a moment, and then, with that respect which young people brought up in public institutions usually exhibit for the clergy, she unbolted the gate, and led me into a sitting-room, where she left me, not ill-pleased, as it seemed to me, to make her escape.

It was a long room, gloomy by reason of the smallness of the windows, the heavy beams and rafters that traversed the ceiling, the dark wainscot, and the black floor-boards. The furniture consisted of four plain caned chairs and a couple of square tables. There were cotton blinds to the windows, and a square of cheap felt carpet on the floor. There was no glass, no pictures, no ornament of any kind ; but a work-basket on one of the tables indicated that it was Mrs. Norman's living-room. It appeared to me they must be very poor or very stoical. I conjectured that they might

have retired to this isolated place to carry out scientific researches, having outgrown the taste for lighter pleasures which is inherent in youth. Possibly Mrs. Norman assisted her husband in his studies.

I waited there until I was rested, and the gloom became intolerable; then I went out into the courtyard, which I found scarcely less depressing than the room I had left.

The very nettles seemed languishing for want of air and sunlight; some tiles blown from the broken roof lay upon the matted weeds and dead grass. The builders had left a pile of rubbish against a disused door; green moss upon the casement showed where the water trickled from the broken gutter under the eaves.

In one corner of the quadrangle stood an old-fashioned gig, with a projecting hood, and two faded green curtains running on a cross rod, which might be drawn for the further protection of the driver. It was plentifully bespattered with mud, and the deaf-mute was cleaning it with a mop. It struck me that she had been cleaning it when I rang; but in that case how, being deaf and not in sight of the gate, had she known I was there? I looked round at the building which enclosed the courtyard on its four sides.

New boarding showed where the ruined side had been cut off from the habitable parts. Of these three sides, one was distinct from the rest, having no overhanging story, but three tall, lancet-headed windows, which gave it the appearance of a chapel or ancient refectory. Blinds of green chintz masked the interior.

My curiosity was leading me towards this wing, when I heard an inarticulate cry behind me, and, turning, found the deaf-mute running towards me.

'That is the laboratory,' she told me with her hands. 'Nobody mustn't go near it.'

I did not attempt to penetrate this mystery, but walked quietly up and down the court until the feeling of melancholy inspired by the dismal place became intolerable; then, leaving a civil message with the girl, I went away, not without a suspicion that she had been instructed to tell me a falsehood, and that Dr. Norman did not wish to see me. And so I went home with my pleasant hopes dispelled, and having had a long walk for nothing.

I waited a week, in the hope that my visit would be ac-

knowledged, and then, not to be too easily overthrown, I trudged again to the Moat. From the brow of the hill overlooking the house I saw the hooded gig cross the bridge, and pass through the gateway into the courtyard.

After this, when the deaf-mute, in some embarrassment, told me no one was at home, there was no mistaking matters. As I toiled home I did my best to judge my new parishioners not unjustly; but the best I could think of them was that they were two crabbed scientists, who disliked all society, or deemed that there was no profit to be made from acquaintance with a simple old country parson.

I was so firmly impressed with the notion that they must be old, that I could scarcely believe my senses when, a few weeks later, seeing a quiet young woman with the deaf-mute in Lipley, I was told that she was Mrs. Norman.

She looked not older than twenty-six, but there were signs of suffering, ill-health, or anxiety in her face which might have made her seem older by several years than she actually was. She was of medium height, with a fair complexion, reddish-brown hair, and pretty features. There was no striking sign of intelligence in her face, no confident air expressive of self-reliance—nothing, in short, to justify the belief that she could share the scientific pursuits of her husband; nothing whatever in common with my idea of a learned woman. Her appearance excited my pity rather than respect. She seemed desirous of avoiding observation, walking quickly with her head down. When her servant directed her attention to me, she abruptly crossed the road. She was dressed in old and dull clothes, with no attempt at personal adornment—no smart bow, or bright colour, with which a young and pretty woman by natural instinct sets off her charms. This careless self-neglect and indifference to the world was in itself most touching to my eyes, which love to dwell on the happiness of youth.

She turned out of the High Street, and I lost sight of her, but later on I saw her pale, scared face in the deep shade as she sat back in the old hooded gig, with one of the faded curtains half drawn.

What could I do? I called once more at the Moat, received the same reply to my inquiries as before, and there I felt my efforts must stop until the doctor or his wife made an advance.

What inquiries were not unjustifiable I made. I discovered that Dr. Norman was a young and good-looking man, another disillusion ! From time to time he was seen at Barstow Station. He came in the hooded gig with the deaf-mute, who left him and then returned to the Moat alone. At the end of five or six days the girl drove to the station, her master arrived by the train from London, and they went away together as they had come. On no occasion had Mrs. Norman been seen with her husband. She remained at the Moat alone with the deaf-mute while her husband was away ; no one ever visited her in his absence, or when he was at home. There was no servant but the deaf-mute ; they lived in perfect solitude.

It was not for me to interfere ; but many a time during the long winter evenings, as I sat in my easy-chair by a bright fire, surrounded by my books and personal comforts, and listened to the wind sweeping the sleet and rain against my windows, I thought of that young wife sitting alone in the dismal sitting-room of that ghostly and desolate ruin of a house.

Winter and spring passed without the occurrence of any event to throw light on the mystery of Beauchamp Moat.

One bright afternoon in June, when I was busy in my garden, old Elizabeth, my servant, brought me a card, and told me that a lady and gentleman were in the best room waiting to see me.

On the card was printed :

‘CAPTAIN V BROMLEY,
Junior United Service Club.’

And above in pencil was written :

‘MRS. NORMAN NORMAN,
Beauchamp Moat.’

I hurried in, slipping off my garden gloves, put on my better coat, and went to my visitors.

My first look was at Mrs. Norman. There was a flush of colour in her cheeks, as she timidly put her hand into mine—for I would not be satisfied with a mere formal bow—which improved her vastly ; but that which pleased me more to see was that her dress, though old and faded, was arranged with care, while a little frilling here, a little lace there, gave

a certain smartness to it which it had altogether lacked when I saw her before. I said to myself that she could not be utterly unhappy to think of these trifles.

I then looked at Captain Bromley, who took my hand with that firm grip which I like to feel when shaking hands with a man.

He was a fine, handsome man of two-and-thirty or thereabouts, tall and broad, with vigour in his well-knit frame, dignity in his carriage, health in his fair, clear skin, and honesty in his well-opened blue eyes. He had a good moustache, a broad forehead, and his light hair, though closely cut, had a little wave in it. Altogether I was well pleased with his appearance, and not less with his frank, open manner.

He said he had come from London on the 17th—it was now the 22nd—and intended staying at Beauchamp Moat some weeks.

‘Dr. Norman is so engrossed in his studies,’ added he, ‘that I took the first opportunity of making your acquaintance; for I have been used to the society of men, and I shall be glad, when Mrs. Norman cannot give me her company, to seek yours.’

This may have been true, but I suspected that his visit was made for Mrs. Norman’s sake, and with a view of providing her with a friend when he was gone.

I made a suitable reply, and then asked what study it was which so engrossed Dr. Norman.

‘Upon my honour, I can’t tell you,’ he replied, with a laugh; and then, turning to Mrs. Norman, he asked: ‘What does Norman do in that laboratory, Edith?’

‘He has never told me,’ she replied slowly. ‘I do not know, Val dear.’

This was a strange revelation. For six months they had been living together under the same roof, and the wife knew nothing of that which occupied her husband from morning till night! Was it apathy on her part, want of confidence on his, or indifference on both sides?

I turned the conversation into a pleasanter channel.

Mrs. Norman was silent at first, fearing possibly that she had offended me by her former rebuff to my advances; but this shyness wore off as she saw that I was amicably disposed towards her. Thus it rested upon Captain Bromley

to sustain the conversation ; but he contrived to generalize the talk, so as to include her in it, and this in such an easy and graceful manner that I felt sure he had been used to the society of ladies as well as men.

It was curious to observe the eagerness with which she listened to every word he spoke, and her admiration of all he said. This, together with the affectionate terms in which she addressed him, led me to surmise that they were nearly related ; nor was I far wrong, for it presently fell out that she was his foster-sister.

When we had gossiped for some time, I led them round my garden, taking with me a hand-basket and a pair of scissors ; and as my roses, which were at their very best, gave Mrs. Norman delight, I snipped off the best blossoms and laid them in my basket, so that by the time we had come to the end of our little tour, I had a collection of roses which any man might be proud of.

We went out by the side-gate into the road, where the queer old gig was standing, and, having helped Mrs. Norman into her seat, I put my basket of roses into her hands with a little speech. The poor young wife took them with an exclamation of joy, and then essayed to thank me as she pressed my hand ; but emotion overcame her, and she drew back into the shade of the hood to conceal the tears that started to her eyes.

It touched my heart to see her so moved by such a trifle as the gift of a few flowers. However, I pretended to see nothing of her agitation, and said I would call on Saturday for the hand-basket.

As they went their way, I returned to my garden, much troubled to think of the wretched position of this young wife, married to a man who evidently cared more for science than for her, but it was some consolation to reflect that she had a good friend in her foster-brother. I determined to do the best that lay in my power to alleviate her sorrows.

On Saturday I walked again to Beauchamp Moat, and was astonished to find the alterations which had been made, and were still in progress there. The old sashes had been taken out of the dwelling-rooms, the casements enlarged, and fine large French windows of plate-glass let in, which, though they took off from the picturesqueness of the outside, added immensely to the comfort of those who dwelt within.

The courtyard had been cleared of weeds, a large raised bed made around the dial, and gardeners were busy planting it with geranium, calceolaria, and other bright plants. Within the change was greater still. The cheap and ugly furniture was gone. A soft, rich Persian carpet and several skins and furs covered the floor; there were elegant curtains to the windows, luxurious easy-chairs, and an abundance of ornaments everywhere in mirror, cabinet, brackets, blue crockery-ware, brass things and the like, with my roses displayed to the best advantage; so that what had been a most ugly room, unpleasant to stay in but for a quarter of an hour, was now a gay and bright apartment, where with a choice of books—of which there was a handsome row in a case—one might be well content to sit alone for a whole day or more.

Everything was brand-new, and I learnt that on the day Captain Bromley and Mrs. Norman visited me, they had been into Lipley and bought all that was handsome there—at whose expense it was not difficult to guess.

Mrs. Norman was in exuberant spirits, and, no longer timid, took me from place to place, directing my admiration from one thing to another with a glee which gave me much concern; for it was not the placid content of a woman and a wife, but rather the feverish reactionary joy of a child suddenly released from punishment and taken into favour—a joy into which no memory of the past, no thought of the future, was allowed to enter.

There was an abrupt check to her gaiety, and she shrank with dread behind Captain Bromley, as the sound of approaching steps in the adjoining room fell upon our ears.

The door opened and a workman entered.

‘I thought it was Norman,’ she said, sinking into a chair with hysterical laughter, as the man withdrew, apologizing for his intrusion.

When the time came for returning to my house, Captain Bromley had the hooded gig brought out, and insisted upon carrying me back to Orwell.

‘Well, sir,’ said I, when we were on our road, ‘and what does Dr. Norman say to all these improvements?’

‘Nothing at all,’ replied Captain Bromley. ‘I don’t think he would care if I pulled the whole place down, so long as I left his laboratory standing, and——’

He checked himself.

'And paid the workmen,' added I mentally, my mind being greatly prejudiced against the young doctor.

'Besides,' he pursued, 'it has nothing whatever to do with him. The house belongs to Edith, and all I have put in it is a wedding present to her.'

'Ah, Mrs. Norman chose that house for a residence?' said I interrogatively.

'No, her husband chose the house; all she had to do was to pay for it and live in it. I was in Egypt when she married.'

Captain Bromley spoke with a bitterness which implied that she should not have married him had he been at home.

'Mrs. Norman did not consult your views with regard to her marriage?' I hinted.

'No; unfortunately she consulted only her own inclination. She was infatuated with Norman—he can make himself exceedingly agreeable when it suits him—and married him in direct opposition to my mother's wishes.'

'Mrs. Norman, then, had money of her own?' said I tentatively.

'Not a penny; that increased her confidence in Norman when he proposed that she should marry in defiance of my mother. But he had gauged my mother's affection for Edith with scientific accuracy, and knew she would forgive Edith when she was in trouble. The trouble came when his money was gone and his credit exhausted. He talked of going to America and sending her back to her old home. The prospect of being an object of pity and derision to her former rivals was insupportable to Edith; she implored my mother's forgiveness and help; my mother settled ten thousand pounds upon her, and this was what Dr. Norman Norman had schemed for. With four or five hundred a year he can carry out studies which may ultimately make him famous and wealthy—he is undoubtedly clever—and he can save enough by economy here to pay for a week's pleasure among his old friends in London when he feels the necessity for relaxation from the labours of his laboratory. There is no need to make a secret of this, for he tacitly admits the truth of all I have charged him with.'

'This places his wife in a deplorable condition,' said I.

'Deplorable indeed. I wish with all my heart they had

separated; but he is not likely to offer her that chance again, now that she has so much per quarter to give him.'

'But,' said I, 'the money is hers; she can surely stipulate that it shall be employed for her own happiness as well as his.'

'She make stipulations with him!' exclaimed Captain Bromley. 'No more than the lamb that went into partnership with the wolf. She is weak, he is strong. She would yield to the guidance of a child. It has been the business of his life to overcome obstacles. How, then, can she cope with him? If one could give her strength there would be some hope, and that is why, Dr. Bullen, I have spoken out in this plain way. You can do more for her than I. You can encourage a feeling of self-reliance, whilst all that I do, I fear, only increases her feeling of dependence.'

I promised to do my best; but the task before me was more difficult than we imagined.

When Captain Bromley was present, Mrs. Norman would not listen to me, nor was it much better when he was absent; for then she was dull and abstracted, and lent an inattentive ear to my homely discourse. She did not want to think of the future, when her foster-brother would no longer be there. And I soon perceived that her whole thought was how to retain him.

Coquettish, as most pretty young women are by nature, she employed all her fascinations to please Captain Bromley—from no ill motive, I am convinced, but simply with the view of making his stay agreeable.

She dressed her hair in a dozen different ways. She must have sat up through the night to make so much variety in her scant stock of dresses. One day I felt convinced that the colour upon her cheeks was artificial.

Whatever secret anxiety she had, she would not let it appear upon her face in his presence; she was never without a smile or a bright reply when he spoke to her. She studied his tastes and wishes, his thoughts, without letting her solicitude be seen by him; she knew as well as the deepest philosopher that smiles have greater influence than tears. All her arts were employed simply to put off the terrible day of separation, when she should be left alone once more in that terrible solitude. But there was a worse

misfortune before her than this, which neither of these innocent persons foresaw. One who has the souls of men in his care must look ahead and on either side for perils to avoid.

I saw a whirlpool of passion towards which the current of events seemed to be carrying these two.

That a strong affection had always existed between Captain Bromley and his adoptive sister was certain; but I had good reason to suppose that on his part the feeling had been stronger than affection, and that it had been his intention, and his mother's wish also, that Edith should be his wife when he returned from Egypt. He might have stifled his passion, but was it not liable to burst out afresh under present influences? Captain Bromley was without occupation. A wound had forced him to retire from the service. He was an idle gentleman, fresh from the dangerous teaching of mess-room and club, where virtue is treated lightly, and infidelity is thought the fittest subject for a farce. Might he not be tempted to seize the treasure thrown in his way by a careless husband?

I observed, with growing uneasiness, a distinct change in his attitude. When his eyes dwelt on Mrs. Norman it was with pleasure, not with pity. He was less grave and anxious in his short references to her future—as if he also wished to dismiss the thought of separation. And there was a tone of gallantry in his conversation with her, perfectly justifiable and perfectly harmless in itself, but indicative of a state of feeling which had not existed in the early days of his visit.

I had great reliance on Captain Bromley's honour; but I determined to keep a sharp eye on him all the same, and speak my mind plainly if I found it were necessary.

'He asked me to be a friend to Mrs. Norman,' said I to myself, 'and I will not fail in the duties of a friend.'

So I went times out of number to the Moat, at the risk of being troublesome, and stayed there when it was obvious that Mrs. Norman, at least, did not want me. A new discovery added to my anxiety.

One day, as I was plodding along the road between Litley and Faulcondale, I was passed by a pony-chaise.

In the rumble behind was a fat servant-girl, asleep. On the driver's seat sat Miss Howard, the most beautiful and

the wealthiest young lady in the county, and by her side was Captain Bromley. Miss Howard, with smiling, down-cast eyes, was listening to him as he gazed upon her beautiful face and talked. So they passed without noticing me.

And now I felt convinced that he was a lady-killer, and the more dangerous because he did not mean to do mischief.

'But what,' thought I, as I stood in the road looking after them, 'what if I am mistaken in my judgment, as many wiser men have been before me? What if Captain Bromley does know the mischief he is doing, and is simply careless of the consequences?'

CHAPTER II.

FROM THE NARRATIVE OF DOROTHEA HOWARD.

It is difficult to speak impartially of past events under present impressions, but I will try to do so by reference to my diary, which naturally presents the facts as I perceived them at the time.

I first saw Mr. Everleigh at Easter, 1883. He was staying at the Dolphin, the best inn in the village, and the one where artists who come to paint the beautiful scenery round about Faulcondale stop. I was passing the inn in my chaise when he arrived, and the innkeeper was taking his portmanteau out of the Barstow fly. He did not look like an artist, for he wore gloves, and was very neatly dressed, and his coat fitted him, whereas an artist always looks as though he had got into somebody else's old jacket to save his own. And he did not stare at me quite so hard as artists usually do. There is so little variety in country society that the arrival of a stranger is always interesting. That is my excuse for wondering who this gentleman could be. But I knew we should see more of him, for no one ever stops at the Dolphin without making acquaintance with Professor Schlobach, my guardian; he is so hospitably inclined, and so quick to see the good points in a person's character, that by the time he has exchanged a dozen sentences with a gentleman he is convinced there never was one more

estimable in all the world—except my father—and straight-way invites him to dinner. And this invitation I never knew an artist to refuse. And sure enough, when my dear old professor returned from his afternoon walk round the village, he brought the new visitor with him.

But Mr. Everleigh was not an artist. He was a clerk in a Government office with a taste for entomology, and had come to Faulcondale to search for an insect peculiar to the district. Hearing at the inn that my guardian was a naturalist, he had introduced himself with a view of getting information. He stayed a week at Faulcondale. Every day he went out with the professor, and the evenings he spent with us. He was very agreeable, and very attentive; he talked ably upon any subject that occurred, and had many interesting anecdotes of celebrated people in London, with whom he seemed to be well acquainted. I think we were all sorry when he left, and glad when he promised to come again in a few weeks.

His next visit was in May; he stayed three days with us, for we would not hear of his going to an inn; he came again for four days at the end of the month, for, being a Government clerk, he had not much to do, and could arrange to take a few days' holiday frequently. We liked him better on the second visit than on the first, and even better on the third, and therein he differed greatly from our artistic friends; for these young gentlemen were always very light and lively at first, and became very dull and flat towards the last, having exhausted all their brilliancy in the first display, like a set piece of fireworks. He seemed to be sincere. He did not seem to force himself to please; his graceful compliments were natural, and though he was never failing in courteous attention to me, he never carried his attentions beyond the limits of courtesy.

As I am to conceal nothing here, I must confess that I thought it possible that he would one day make me an offer of marriage. And this possibility was not displeasing to me.

He was well connected, his manners were those of a gentleman by birth and education, and his position appeared to be equal to mine, for up to that time I believed my fortune to be no more than my guardian could give me out of the sum left to him by my father for my education.

It was after Mr. Everleigh's third visit we discovered that my father had left a quarter of a million of money, which would probably be mine on the day of my marriage.

On the 15th of June Mr. Everleigh came again. He told us he had arranged to take a week's holiday. In the evening the professor told him of the remarkable discovery that had been made. He congratulated me, but I fancied he spoke with restraint, and the next day it seemed to me he was more formal and less at his ease in talking to me, from which I concluded that the change in my fortune had altered his prospects. His extreme sensibility made him recoil from a position where his motives might be misunderstood, and he wished me to understand that the disparity in our fortunes precluded him from the hope of making me his wife. All this seemed to be over-strained delicacy, but I could attribute the marked alteration in his behaviour to no other cause.

On the morning of the 17th he actually avoided me, to my great annoyance, for it certainly implied his belief that my feelings towards him were governed by sordid motives, which was an injustice, for if money were to form a barrier between me and my friends, I heartily wished I had none.

Being left alone, and feeling hurt, I had my horse saddled, and leaving word that I should return to dinner, I went for a good long ride to shake off my ill-humour.

After following the road nearly as far as Barstow, I took the bridle-path that winds round the hill we call 'Old Hump,' and had just come in sight of Faulcondale valley, where our village was indicated by a thin veil of blue smoke that hung over the still elms, when I found a very unexpected obstacle in my path.

At this point the little stream which for some distance follows the course of the narrow bridle-path along the side of the hill spreads into a shallow pool, and turns under a bridge to fall down the hill in a ravine it has cut for itself. The bridge is no more than a yard wide, and scarcely a foot above the water that runs under it. A young man had coolly stretched himself along the bridge, and lay there with one foot in the water, his hat drawn over his eyes, his elbows set on the ground, and his chin resting on the palms of his hands. It was very hot and still; except the little

stream, all nature seemed to have fallen asleep, and this young man with it. Perhaps the noise of the falling water prevented him from hearing my approach; at any rate, he made no movement when my horse came to a stand a few feet from him.

I could have gone through the pool, but I did not feel disposed to do that; so I quietly waited till he should see me and get out of my way.

Coquelicot, my dear old horse, seemed to be turning the matter over in his mind, for he stretched out his head, regarding the young man, and twitching his ears to and fro for some time; then he gave a little whinny, as if to say, 'Now then, young man, what's the matter here?'

At this sound the young man drew back one arm, and, turning his face up, looked at me, but with such assurance that I set him down for an artist at once. Any other ordinary young man would have jumped up in confusion with a thousand apologies. He did not attempt to move, but when I gave an impatient flick with my riding-whip, he said with the utmost composure:

'The stream is not deep, and there is room between the rock and the bridge for you and your nag to pass.'

'I know that,' said I, very angry indeed, for besides his request—insolent as it seemed—that I should get out of his way, it was the first time I had heard my dear old Coquelicot called a nag.

'You're not afraid to go through the water?' he asked.

I made no reply; I simply waited for him to move. I must have looked terribly angry.

'The fact is,' he pursued, 'I don't see how you're to cross the bridge whilst I am on it.'

'Then you will see the advisability of getting off,' said I; 'for I assure you I intend to cross by that bridge and by no other way!' And, indeed, I was so incensed that, had he not moved, I would have put Coquelicot at the bridge, even though he should go over the side and throw me.

'Rather than be jumped upon,' said he, with mock gravity, 'I will get out of your way; restrain your steed for one moment, and——'

He stopped with a wince, and a stifled cry of pain; for in raising his foot he had struck it against an unseen projection in the side of the bridge. I saw his eyes close as he bit his

lips, and the colour go out of his face. Then he dropped forward heavily on his elbow.

I perceived then that he was gravely hurt, and had been lying along the bridge from necessity rather than caprice. With a sharp pang of self-reproach, such as I too often feel through the consequence of ungoverned temper, I threw myself out of the saddle, and putting out my hands to support his sinking head as I dropped on my knees beside him, I cried :

‘Heaven forgive me ! I did not know you were hurt.’

‘Only a sprain,’ he said, attempting to laugh as he raised himself ; ‘caught my foot in a bramble, and came down the hill at a run.’

He glanced up the steep hillside covered with loose stones, interspersed with tufts of broom and furze, and trailing briars. His lips were livid, and he trembled as he spoke. Despite the assumed carelessness with which he spoke, I saw that he was giddy and faint.

‘There, stay like that only a moment,’ said I, and running round to the edge of the pool, I filled my hat—which was a formless felt that could be knocked into shape, and became me, as I thought—with water. I carried the water back, put my hat in a hollow while I stripped off my gloves, and then, scooping the water up in the palms of my hands, I bathed his temples and forehead with it. That seemed to bring life and strength back to him.

‘That is good,’ said he, looking up gratefully. And then he smiled as he looked at me, for doubtless, now that I felt sorry for him and a little ashamed of myself, I looked a little nicer than when I sat on Coquelicot frowning, and hating him with all my heart.

‘I am all right now,’ he said presently.

I nodded and smiled, for I was glad to think I had helped to restore him, and then I unfolded my handkerchief and wiped the water from his face.

He was as meek as a child, and submitted to this treatment gratefully. I felt that he also deserved reproach, so I said :

‘You ought to have told me you were hurt at the first.’

‘I dare say I should have done so,’ said he, ‘had you looked then as you look now. I did not give you credit for the virtue of a good Samaritan ; I fancied that if the bridge

had given way and toppled me down into the valley you would have been pleased.'

'So I should,' said I, 'just for a minute.'

He laughed, and said :

'Now I wonder if that's the keynote of your character ?'

I felt that it was, but wouldn't say so.

'Who could have imagined,' said I, 'that you were in pain, seeing you there quite still and composed ?'

'Well, you see,' he replied, 'I couldn't very well jump about, so sitting still was excusable. And the best thing a man can do is to take his trouble with composure, unless he has a Frenchman's faculty for weeping. Thank you ever so much for your kindness,' he added, holding out his hand.

'You don't think I am going to leave you here alone ?' said I.

'I'm sure you wouldn't if you could do me any good by staying, but as you may find someone below who may help me to get along, I think you will.'

'Have you far to go ?' I asked.

He replied that he had to go to Beauchamp Moat, which is four or five miles from Faulcondale.

'That is a long way,' said I.

'It will be all right when I get down to that village,' said he, nodding towards Faulcondale ; 'I can get a cart to carry me over.'

'But it is three miles to the village,' I said.

'You will send a man or a couple of lads to help me ?'

I considered for a moment what it would be best to do, and then, an idea coming into my head, I asked him if he thought he could go down the hill on my horse. He looked at dear old Coquelicot, who had fallen asleep, and was nodding his head every now and then like a Christian, and replied : 'I am not much of a horseman just at present, but I think I can do that.'

'Then there is no need to wait for clumsy boys to help you,' said I. 'Don't move ; I see how it is to be done.' And with that I woke up Coquelicot, and led him into the water alongside the bridge. 'Now,' said I, 'you have only just to slip carefully on his back.'

'Like that,' he said, and, suiting the action to the word, he seated himself in the saddle. 'But you ?' he added, in a tone of anxiety

'I shall walk, of course,' said I. 'Will you have my whip?'

'Well, for the sake of appearances,' said he, taking it.

We went down the hill, he on Coquelicot, and I walking beside, with my skirt in one hand and my wet hat in the other, and we were both silent, for I was wondering what sort of a person he really was, and perhaps he was making similar speculations with regard to me. I fancied that he certainly must be an artist because of his boldness, but there was nothing offensive in his manner, only that it nettled me a little; for it was the grand air of a prince finding himself under obligations to a peasant, and I was not a peasant either by birth or look. I had a riding skirt, a silk jersey, and mousquetaire gloves that came to my elbows; and a peasant would have worn a showy hat, whereas I was content with a plain felt hat, the only ornament on it being a pheasant's feather, but which suited my face well. He was very handsome, his hands were delicate, his dress was well-fitting—that made me doubtful whether he was an artist after all. 'But if he has been used to the society of the grandest ladies in the world, he cannot mistake me for a farmer's daughter,' thought I.

'You will drop me at that hut on the right,' said he after a time; 'the path is wide enough here for a cart.'

'No, I shall take you home,' said I; 'we have a chaise—that will be better for you than a cart.'

'And where is your home?' he said.

I pointed out the old farmhouse in the distance.

'That is a long way yet,' said he; 'you will be tired.'

'Do you think I am a child?' I asked, with a little indignation.

'Now and then,' he replied.

I asked him why.

'I can hardly tell you,' said he, smiling; 'perhaps it is because you don't want to be thought a child.'

'I suppose no one who wishes to be more than she is, likes to be thought something less,' said I, after reflecting on his words.

'I suppose not, even though she were a much older and wiser philosopher than you,' he returned.

'I don't pretend to be a philosopher,' said I.

'Nor a dairymaid, either——'

‘ Oh, we have nothing whatever to do with the farm,’ said I, ‘ except that we live in the farmhouse.’

‘ May I ask who “ we ” are ?’

I told him that my guardian was Professor Schlobach, the entomologist ; and that my name was Howard, that I had been christened Dorothea, but was called Doris.

‘ A very pretty name,’ said he. ‘ My name is Bromley ; I was christened Valentine, and some people call me Val.’

I would say no more, for his tone of pleasantry offended the self-love with which I was endowed to an inordinate extent, and so we marched on in silence till we came to the foot of the hill and struck the road. I went in advance and swung back the meadow gate ; he passed through, and we crossed the meadow to the rick-yard, whence we can see the gables and upper windows of our old house over the privet hedge that surrounds the garden. The side-gate of the garden was open, and two gentlemen were standing by it.

‘ There is my guardian and Mr. Everleigh,’ said I.

Turning my head quickly, I found Captain Bromley looking at me ; before he could fix his eyes in the direction indicated, Mr. Everleigh was gone.

‘ Is that Mr. Everleigh ?’ he asked.

‘ No, that is my professor. Mr. Everleigh has just turned back into the garden.’

He looked puzzled, and as I had mentioned Mr. Everleigh’s name, I felt it necessary to add that he was a friend of my professor, and like him an entomologist.

‘ If he resembles your professor,’ said Captain Bromley, looking at my dear old guardian with good-humour in his eyes, ‘ I shall be glad to know him.’

I know now that, involuntarily, I had led him to suppose by my description that Mr. Everleigh was an elderly man of science like my professor.

But for that fatal misconception the most deplorable disasters might have been averted.

CHAPTER III

CONTINUED FROM THE NARRATIVE OF DOROTHEA HOWARD.

I MUST say something about Professor Schlobach and myself, that our relations with Mr. Everleigh and Captain Bromley may be understood, and that my guardian's simplicity and my folly may not appear incredible to persons of more extended experience.

In 1876 I was twelve years old, and a boarder in Miss Brougham's school in Devonshire.

One day Miss Brougham fetched me from the class-room, and, telling me a friend of my father's had come to see me, and I must prepare myself for dreadful news, she took me into my room and made me change my frock and brush my hair. When I was presentable, she took me into the drawing-room, and introduced me to Professor Schlobach.

We were disappointed with each other at first sight. I, who had the greatest admiration for my father, expected to find his friend with a handsome and noble presence, which this middle-aged gentleman, with his short legs and large face, certainly had not; and he had hoped to find an image of his dear friend in me, and I was not at all like him, for he had a fair complexion and gray eyes, whilst my skin was of a dark tint, my eyes as black as jet, and, to complete the dissimilitude, my nose was arched.

I saw his countenance fall, but it was only that first glance that chilled him. Before Miss Brougham had finished saying 'This is Mr. Howard's daughter Dorothea,' he took me in his arms, and, hugging me to him, exclaimed in great agitation:

'My dear child! My poor, dear little child!' Only he pronounced the words 'my boor dear leetle jild,' for he did not then speak English so well as he does now.

I was not at all pleased with his caresses, for his coat smelt unpleasantly of tobacco-smoke, and as he held me to him and I raised my face to escape the odour, I noticed that he wore old-fashioned stick-up collars and a hideous green satin scarf, and there was not a single hair on his face—and this bareness was the more obvious because he wore a chestnut wig, very full and curly, peculiarities which

the girls would be sure to make fun of behind his back if they saw him.

Miss Brougham left us together, and when she was gone I drew myself out of his arms and seated myself on a chair, fearing he would take me on his knee, despite my being such a great girl ; but he had his handkerchief to find, for a tear was trickling down his nose, and so I escaped that.

After feeling two or three times in one tail pocket and then the other, he at last drew out an enormous red silk handkerchief, and having wiped his eyes and blown his nose with a sound like a trumpet, that might well reach across the playground, he rolled it up in a ball and held it ready for further use on his knee. Then, turning to me, he shook his head, whilst his chin twitched and his thick lips trembled, and he said :

‘ My child, your father is dead.’

It was a shock to me, but I was less distressed in hearing of my loss than the professor was in telling it. I cried to think that my father was no more, and that I was now all alone in the world ; but I cried still more bitterly when this odd, ungainly professor told me that henceforth he would be a father to me.

Although I was to some degree wanting in affection—having never known a mother’s love, nor any trouble, nor any tenderness except that of teachers whose interest it was to be lenient and indulgent to me—I was not without feeling ; but it was with a sentiment of admiration rather than of love that I regarded my father. I had not seen him for three years ; I cannot recollect meeting him more than six times in the seven years I had been in Miss Brougham’s care. So there could not be any deep love between us. But I had been taught to be proud of him by Miss Brougham, who owed her prosperity to the use she made of his name. The books concerning his travels in Brazil and in Central Africa lay on her drawing-room table, his portrait hung upon the wall ; the newspaper paragraphs relating to his movements formed the text of geographical and ethnological discourses delivered publicly to the school, and I had sufficient discrimination to see that in deference to my father’s position I was allowed to do exactly as I liked.

The professor took me for a drive, and, questioning me, discovered that I was profoundly ignorant, self-willed, and

conceited ; and as he would not believe that any of these defects were natural to the child of his dear friend, he attributed them all to the vicious training I had received. He looked for another school without delay, and in less than a fortnight I was transferred to Mrs. Grimsey's academy at Norwood. Mrs. Grimsey understood me thoroughly—I was a good child spoilt by unprincipled treatment. What I needed was kind yet firm direction. The professor agreed entirely with this view, and so did I up to a certain point. I was a perfect angel under the kind treatment, which lasted just as long as Mrs. Grimsey's ideas were in accord with mine, but when firmness was required on her part to carry a point on which we disagreed, I rebelled. I would *not* take my place at the bottom of a class whereof the top girl stood as high as my elbow—it was an indignity not to be supported by the daughter of Digby Howard, the great traveller.

There was a brief struggle between Mrs. Grimsey and me, and then Professor Schlobach was requested to remove me from the school, which was being demoralized by my insubordination. The professor tried one more school, and the result being still less satisfactory than in the former trial, he came to the conclusion that my character was of an exceptional kind, and required a special treatment, which he, perhaps, was best able to conduct, and with this conviction he set about his task at once. He took a journey of two hundred miles from London to see an old farmhouse which was to be sold with its furniture, and finding it pleasantly situated, with all that seemed to him necessary for healthy life, he bought it. Then he advertised for an elderly lady to serve as governess and housekeeper, and having found one who had a soft voice, a sweet face, and an air of good breeding and pure living, he engaged her ; after that, he had nothing to do but to give up his bachelor lodgings near the British Museum, and take me with Miss Trevor, my governess, to the new house at Faulcondale. And here I began a new life and a better one, as more generous sentiments warmed my heart.

There was no question of education at first. Miss Trevor had ample occupation in arranging her rooms and getting things into perfect order, and my professor only concerned himself in making me happy. He bought me a goat that

learned to follow me about like a dog, and pigeons that I taught to feed from my hand, and then a pony to ride and a chaise to drive in. He consulted my inclinations, and gratified my wishes in everything; he was never tired of talking to me about my father, whose constant companion he had been for six years—sharing the difficulties and hardships of his perilous journeys. And as his admiration for my father was based upon love, and his indulgence to me sprang entirely from the purest motives of affection, I came to reverence him just as I had come to despise Miss Brougham for the selfish interest which actuated her.

He was wonderfully patient with me. He had many cases of flies and insects collected in his travels, and these he had set himself to classify and write about during a certain fixed time each day; but there was no hour at which he would not lay aside his pen, and go out with me, and I taxed him frequently, for there was no companion like him. A leaf, a stone, a beetle, was in his hands the subject for a fairy story as charming as those of Hans Andersen. He was as simple as a child—indeed, I doubt if a child could not more readily have cheated him than he the child. He had a vague belief in the existence of wickedness, of evil in the abstract, but, practically, he saw nothing but good in the world, through living so long among simple people, and looking only for their good qualities.

He was my friend, putting himself on a level with my understanding, confiding in me, and winning my confidence; there were no secrets between us. As my love for this dear old scholar grew, those personal peculiarities which had at first repelled me only served to endear him to me. His ungainliness, his want of taste in dress, his defective pronunciation, encouraged feelings of playful familiarity in the place of the chilling awe with which I must have regarded him had he been absolutely perfect.

He was the most indulgent teacher: he excused my failings, he would not let me regard learning as a necessary infliction. No lesson was forced upon me; he merely sought to train my inclinations in the direction of their better tendencies. I dare say I took advantage of his leniency; I was idle when I should have been active; but he never lost patience, and his gentle confidence in me succeeded ultimately. For when I did settle down to my

studies it was with a keen desire to give him pleasure ; and so what I learnt became fixed in my memory.

Naturally, by constant association with him, I contracted something of his love of goodness, and faith in the honesty of mankind. He developed what was good in my nature, and softened much that was harsh ; but despite his gentle influence, I remained impatient of contradiction, quick to take offence, not readily forgiving of slights, eager for revenge of injuries, and over-conscious of my own merits. In addition to these defects, I was proud of my birth ; but this he could scarcely have regarded as a fault, since he rather encouraged than deprecated my pride, himself obtaining a genealogical tree to prove that my father sprang from an old and noble stock, and stoutly maintaining that the Feraldi, from which house my mother came, was a family as proud and great as the Capulets or Montagues.

I have said enough to explain my own character, and that of my dear old professor, who now came quickly to meet us. I remember he wore his brown holland suit, and had nothing on his head but his chestnut wig. His thick lips were parted, and his eyes rounded with astonishment at the strange spectacle presented—I leading Coquelicot with a handsome gentleman on his back.

I introduced Captain Bromley, and in a few words explained matters ; then it was hard to say which feeling predominated—anxiety for Captain Bromley's sprain, or pleasure in having a new friend to entertain.

'I am glad to make your acquaintance,' said he, grasping Captain Bromley's hand, and his face beaming with good-nature, 'though I wish it were under pleasanter conditions for you. We will see to your foot, and we will have dinner, and then it will be quite soon enough to think about the chaise to take you away from us.'

Captain Bromley declared that his foot required no attention, but my guardian, who had some knowledge of surgery, insisted upon doing it 'segundum ardem,' as he said. While the dressing was being made I took Coquelicot round to the stable, and then ran up to dress for dinner. I unplaited my hair and coiled it on the top of my head, as I saw by the *Journal des Modes* it was the fashion to wear it in London, and then I put on my black lace dress, the bodice of which only half hid my shoulders and arms, and

thus dressed I thought I looked very nice; and so I think did Captain Bromley, who rose directly I entered the room and paid me a graceful compliment.

They had been talking about Egypt, where my professor told me Captain Bromley had fought and been wounded, while charging with the regiment of which he was a captain. I was pleased to hear of this; it gave me a good opinion of Captain Bromley's modesty, for he had said nothing to me of his rank, and had tried to make light of his hurt, which must have been hard indeed to bear so manfully. I wonder I had not guessed his profession, for his bearing was soldierly, and he looked as if he might be a hero. And now Miss Trevor coming in to say that dinner was served, our thoughts turned for the first time—that is to say, mine did—to Mr. Everleigh.

Where was he? He had not been seen since he stood at the garden gate with my guardian. Search was made, but he could not be found. His hat was gone from the hall. We were all greatly astonished—except Captain Bromley, who, I fancy, thought he had gone in pursuit of a grasshopper, or some such thing—for Mr. Everleigh was so methodical in his habits, so careful in observing the conventional rules of society, that we could not attribute his abrupt departure to caprice.

Whilst we were still speculating on this subject, a lad from the village brought a letter which explained the mystery. Mr. Everleigh had suddenly remembered a letter which he wished to post before the afternoon mail was made up. He had gone to the post, and there found a messenger from Barstow inquiring his address. The messenger had a telegram to deliver. It was from London, informing Mr. Everleigh that his brother had met with an accident, and lay at the point of death. The letter concluded with apologies to me and my guardian for his brusque departure, and begged that the lad might take his luggage to the railway-station at Barstow to be sent on after him.

Another curious incident occurred after dinner.

Captain Bromley picked up a damascened paper-knife that lay on the table of the sitting-room, and after examining it, turned to my professor and said:

‘May I ask if you bought this at Cairo?’

The professor replied that it did not belong to him, but to

Mr. Everleigh, who had accidentally brought it in a book he was reading.

‘That is odd,’ said Captain Bromley, ‘because I sent a knife exactly like this from Cairo to the lady I am going to visit to-day.’

There was a very obvious explanation of this mystery, for it was not at all improbable that Mrs. Norman, the lady living at Beauchamp Moat, whither he was going, taking a book to read in the woods, had dropped her knife, and that Mr. Everleigh, scanning the ground for insects, had found it.

This matter, however, soon passed out of our minds, for my guardian, catching at Captain Bromley’s intimation of going on to Beauchamp Moat, at once protested loudly against his leaving us with his foot under treatment, and begged him to stay with us until the next day with such earnestness that Captain Bromley accepted the invitation.

After tea the professor took our new friend into his study to smoke and talk, and Miss Trevor and I went down the garden to enjoy the fresh air, which seemed to us very much better than tobacco smoke. But the gentlemen were clearly not of our opinion, for they stayed there so long that I began to think they intended to leave us to ourselves all the evening; but it was the loveliest evening—very still and calm. Just after the church clock had struck eight, and we were sitting quite still on the bench under the apple-tree, to our great surprise the nightingale began to sing from the elm in the meadow.

We had not heard him for several nights, and had come with regret to think that he would sing no more this summer; and so, full of delight, I ran up to the house to tell the gentlemen—forgetting, for the moment, that nightingales might be less uncommon to Captain Bromley than they are to us living in the north.

But he rose with alacrity, saying it would be unlucky not to hear the last song of the nightingale, and leaning on my guardian’s arm, and with what assistance I could offer, he went to the end of the garden, where Miss Trevor was standing.

The nightingale was gone; we listened in vain.

‘He is gone,’ I said, turning to Captain Bromley.

I found that he was regarding me, but there was nothing

unpleasant in his regard; indeed, there was a very kind look in his eyes.

‘I am sorry for that,’ he said quietly.

‘He will return, perhaps,’ said I. ‘Do you want to go indoors again?’

‘Not so much as to stay out here,’ he replied; and though there was very little in those words, they made me like him for the soft tone in which they were spoken.

So we sat down side by side on the bench, and my professor seated himself at one end and Miss Trevor at the other. We said nothing at all. My guardian smoked his long pipe thoughtfully, and Miss Trevor sat with her head lowered and her hands crossed in her lap; and I wondered if she were recalling old memories, and thinking of the songs that were never again to fall on her ear. For the silence of the evening and the last sunset tints lingering over the hills were full of sad delight.

I know not why I felt so happy and yet so ready to cry.

The next morning we drove to Beauchamp Moat. My guardian would have accompanied us, he having taken a strong liking to Captain Bromley, but as this was market-day at Lipley, and Miss Trevor could not well do her shopping there without her maid Eliza, he had to forego that pleasure; but he walked to the top of the hill beside us, and stood there smoking his pipe and looking after us until we got to the foot and turned off by the old London road.

Captain Bromley wished to introduce Mrs. Norman to us when we reached Beauchamp Moat, but there was only a deaf and dumb servant at the house, who, with some difficulty, made us understand that her mistress and master were out.

Captain Bromley said that he should certainly come to see us again when his foot was in walking condition. I told him I should be going to Lipley on Saturday.

‘Then it is very likely you will find me somewhere on the road between Lipley and Faulcondale about this hour,’ said Captain Bromley, looking at his watch.

We shook hands and parted, but suddenly reflecting that he did not know the locality, I stopped Coquelicot and looked back. He had not entered the house, but stood by the gate looking towards us. He came to the side of the chaise.

‘This is not the direct road to Lipley. I usually go by the new road, and to get there you would have to cross the hills by the fields, if—if——’

‘I shall cross the fields,’ said he, and then we shook hands again without any reason and parted.

We went on to Lipley, which was more stupid than ever I had known it that day, and then in the afternoon returned by the new road to Faulcondale. But before we came within sight of the village my dear old guardian met us, with such a woebegone and terror-stricken face that we were seized with alarm before he opened his lips.

‘My darling child,’ he said, laying his trembling hands on mine, and speaking with terrible agitation in his voice, ‘my poor, poor child—I have been robbed! And all your fortune is lost!’

CHAPTER IV

FROM THE NARRATIVE OF THOMAS CRAIK.

My name is Thomas Craik. I am twenty-two years of age. I was born of poor but honest parents. I will add this tribute to their memory: they died as they had lived—in the workhouse. I was educated up to a certain point by a grateful parish; but I quitted my studies to learn horse-riding in a travelling circus. Having the misfortune to fall and break a couple of ribs the first time I attempted to throw a somersault on a horse, I was declared unfit for the profession and sent to the hospital. Falling once more upon the hands of the parish, I was articled to the vestry clerk, but being ambitious, I quitted his office at the end of three months, and after vicissitudes too numerous to mention, found myself at the age of twenty-one in the position of under-clerk to Mr. Gardener, solicitor, of Pump Court, with a week’s notice to leave. My duties consisted in keeping the office clean and running on commissions, and these I faithfully performed; but a natural desire to better my position gave offence to my employer, who considered that it was no business of mine to inquire into the affairs of his clients. Unfortunately or not, curiosity is my ruling passion. I never yet read an enigma without puzzling out

its solution, and the greatest pleasure I know is to interpret the announcements in cipher which occasionally appear in the second column of the *Times*.

On the nineteenth of June—three days after I had received notice from Mr. Gardener—when I arrived at nine o'clock to open the office, I found a bulky, elderly gentleman, with a heavy face and a brown wig, waiting on the landing. He looked like a client who had lost his case after a long trial. His skin was a bad colour, and his wig had come out of curl and hung in wisps over his ears.

'Do you wish to see Mr. Gardener?' I asked.

'Yes, I do,' he replied.

'This way,' said I, opening the door and leading him into the office. 'May I ask your name?'

'My name is Wilhelm Schlobach,' he answered; 'and who are you?'

'I am Mr. Gardener's clerk; if there is anything I can do for you——' I said with assurance, hoping from his simple appearance that he might be led into disclosing his affairs.

He shook his head and said he would wait until Mr. Gardener arrived. He seated himself and never said a word for an hour. Then he grew fidgety and looked at his watch. At a quarter past ten Mr. Hughes, the first clerk, came in. He and Mr. Schlobach had evidently met before. Mr. Hughes said it was uncertain whether Mr. Gardener would be in town that day, and, repeating my question, asked if he could do anything for Mr. Schlobach. After a little hesitation the stout gentleman said:

'Yes, we will go inside and talk about it.'

Mr. Hughes had the keys of Mr. Gardener's office; he opened the baize-covered door; they entered, and he closed the door carefully. I slipped into the lavatory. This lavatory was actually part of the inner office, from which it was cut off by a partition of match lining. On the inner side—that is, in Mr. Gardener's office—this partition was fitted with shelves and filled with deed-boxes. In one of these boards, which were of ordinary deal, I had discovered a loose knot at about the height of my chin. By arranging the deed-boxes on the other side to leave a space, one could, on withdrawing the knot, look straight on to the table at which Mr. Gardener sat. The lavatory was dark and the

office was light, so that one could see without the risk of being seen. An upholsterer's tack fixed in the knot enabled me to take it out and replace it with the greatest ease. And now, being in the lavatory, I took out the knot and put my ear to the hole. Mr. Schlobach was speaking :

'Very well, then,' I heard him say with a strong German pronunciation, 'before my friend was shot he wrote two letters—one was for Mr. Gardener, the other was for his daughter, Dorothea. I gave the first to Mr. Gardener, and after reading it he told me that my friend had left me twelve thousand pounds unconditionally. I knew what that was for, though—it was to educate his daughter. All right. The other letter was to be given to Dorothea the day after her marriage, and it was not to be opened till then. You see? About a fortnight ago Mr. Gardener sent me an advertisement cut out of the *Times* newspaper, which said that the next of kin to Digby Howard, who died in Africa in 1876, would hear of something very good indeed by writing to Mr. Roland Dundas, Penshurst. You see? Very well; I wrote to this Mr. Dundas and he wrote to me, and I went to see him. I learnt that when he was a young man he and Mr. Howard were very great friends. Mr. Dundas was junior partner in a big bank, but he got into debt, and to save him Mr. Howard signed a bill that nearly ruined my friend, but it saved Mr. Dundas and the bank. Mr. Howard never expected to get back a penny of his money, but Mr. Dundas gave him an I·O·U, and said that if he grew rich again he would pay it to Mr. Howard or anyone who presented it with his written authority to receive it. You see? All right. I came here to tell Mr. Gardener all about it. But he already knew these facts. The letter Mr. Howard wrote to him before going on that last and fatal expedition told him that he had put the I O U in his daughter's hands, not knowing whether it was worth anything or not, but that she could not present it until the day after her marriage—do you see?'

'Perfectly,' replied Mr. Hughes. 'The I O U was enclosed in the letter addressed to Miss Howard, which was not to be opened until the day after her marriage.'

'All right——'

At this moment the door of the outer office opened and shut, and I recognised the quick step of Mr. Gardener. I

left the hole and busied myself in washing my hands ; but there was no danger—Mr. Gardener went straight into the inner office. I slipped back in an instant to the hole in the partition.

‘ —as if you had been up all night.’ I caught these words from Mr. Gardener’s lips.

‘ So I have, my friend,’ replied Mr. Schlobach. ‘ I left Barstow by the midnight mail. The letter is gone !’

‘ The letter ?’

‘ The letter written by my friend Howard to his daughter, and given to me to take care of—I have lost it.’

‘ Lost it, my dear sir ! Where ?’

‘ It has been stolen from my desk in my house at Faulcon-dale.’

‘ This is very serious. You know that it probably contains an order to pay something like a quarter of a million of money.’

‘ I know all about that ; I wish I didn’t.’

‘ When was it stolen ?’

‘ Yesterday morning. I was showing it to a gentleman the night before, and——’

‘ Have you telegraphed to Mr. Dundas to stop payment ?’

‘ No—I never thought of that—I got the policeman from Barstow, and we were looking for the thief all day yesterday, and——’

‘ Twenty-four hours since it was lost, and payment not stopped ! It’s too late. Put on your hat, Hughes, quick !’

There was silence ; I looked through the hole and saw Mr. Gardener writing out a telegram, and Mr. Schlobach looking on in blank wonder. Hughes came back with his hat on.

‘ Take this to the office at once,’ said Mr. Gardener. ‘ Wire first to Dundas and Co., in Throgmorton Street, and then to Mr. Dundas at his private address. I’ve written it here. Wait for an answer at the office. Repeat the wire in half an hour if you get no reply in that time. Don’t lose a moment.’

Mr. Hughes went off on his errand at once.

‘ If the mischief is not already done,’ said Mr. Gardener, taking off his gloves, ‘ we shall prevent the money falling into the hands of a thief. Now, whom do you suspect ?’

‘ The policeman says there was a tinker——’

'A tinker—ah, well, have you lost anything besides the letter?'

'No.'

'Then an ordinary thief has not taken it. Where did you keep this letter?'

'In a secret drawer in my desk.'

'Hum, about the unsafest place you could put it in. Every child knows where to find these secret drawers and how to open them. Who is the gentleman to whom you showed this letter?—a most ill-advised proceeding, allow me to remark.'

'The gentleman was Captain Valentine Bromley,' said Mr. Schlobach, in a tone which seemed to imply that there could be no doubt about his honesty.

'How long have you known him?' Mr. Gardener asked, in no way moved by the tone of conviction.

'He came to the house the day before last.'

'Do you lock your desk?'

'No; the lock is gone wrong.'

'And the door of the room?'

'There is not any key.'

'There are shutters to the windows, of course?'

'Shutters? Oh no; there never were any.'

'And where was this Captain Bromley between the night before last and yesterday morning?'

'In my house, of course.'

There was silence. I clapped my eye to the hole. Mr. Gardener was gently tapping the back of his hands with his gloves and trying to repress a smile.

He drew a piece of paper from the case and took up a pen. 'This Bromley calls himself——'

'Captain Valentine Bromley,' Mr. Schlobach replied, in a tone of irritation.

'I suppose you don't know his address?' he said, writing.

'Yes, I do; he is staying with Dr. Norman at Beauchamp Moat—that is, about four miles from Faulcondale.'

'Do you know Dr. Norman?'

'No, I don't.'

'Have you shown this letter to anyone else?'

'Yes, lots of people.'

'Lots of people?'

'Well, all my friends that come to see me; I tell them

the good fortune of my child ; do you think it is a thing to be ashamed of and hide, eh ?

‘ You refer to your neighbours, I suppose ?’

‘ Yes.’

‘ Is there anyone amongst them that might be likely to marry Miss Howard ?’

‘ No ; the neighbours are not likely to marry her—oh no !’

‘ There is nobody besides Captain Valentine Bromley who might wish to marry her ?’

‘ Yes, there is our friend Mr. Everleigh ; but he is not a neighbour.’

‘ Ah ; let us hear about Mr. Everleigh now.’

‘ He is a Government clerk, and he comes down sometimes to spend a few days with us, and he is fond of natural history, and he is, I think, very fond of Doris as well.’

‘ Does he seem to you a careful man ?’

‘ Oh, yes, yes, yes ! He is very careful indeed.’

‘ The sort of man who would like to be sure how much a young lady was worth before he ventured to marry her ?’

‘ Why, you don’t think he is a thief, do you ?’ asked Mr. Schlobach resentfully.

‘ Unless we are to be guided by the wisdom of a country policeman, and attribute this theft to an ignorant tinker, we must doubt everyone to find who is above suspicion. When was Mr. Everleigh last at your house ?’

‘ The day before yesterday—he left before the letter was missing—he went to London.’

‘ You are sure of that ?’

‘ Quite sure.’

‘ I should like to know Mr. Everleigh’s Christian name, and what Government appointment he holds ?’

‘ His name is Richard Everleigh. I don’t know what office he is in.’

‘ We may find that out,’ said Mr. Gardener, writing. Then there was a long pause ; at length he said :

‘ Can you tell me if Captain Bromley knew of Mr. Everleigh’s pretensions—of his wish to marry Miss Howard ?’

‘ I told him I thought Mr. Everleigh would like to marry her.’

‘ Did he make any observation ?’

‘ No, I am sure he did not. He was very quiet after I spoke.’

‘Thoughtful?’

‘I don’t know. We generally are thoughtful when we are silent.’

‘Does he seem to you a generous man?’

‘I am certain of that—splendid fellow’

‘Might he have been thinking, in a generous, soldierly fashion, now, that it was a pity that a beautiful girl like Miss Howard should be married to a man fond of natural history, and that it would be well for her if the temptation to marry her for her possible fortune were removed?’

‘All right, I see what you mean, sir, and I tell you I don’t think Captain Bromley would steal that letter to prevent Mr. Everleigh marrying her, even if he knew she was being married for what that letter contained.’

‘In short, you are resolved to doubt no one, professor?’

‘I will doubt anyone but those two gentlemen.’

‘That gives me more hope. Now, sir, who lives in the house with you?’

‘Miss Trevor—you know her—and Doris, and a maid-servant, Eliza. And the nicest little maid-servant that ever was.’

‘Not inquisitive?’

‘Not anything that is bad.’

‘Because a letter of this kind, that must have created some stir in your village, might have been taken from mere curiosity, and the taker, without wishing to keep it, might be at a loss how to return it without being discovered.’

‘Ah, I see again what you mean. You think Doris may have taken it herself.’

‘What do you think?’

‘That it’s all tam nonsense what you say,’ cried Mr. Schlobach, jumping up so hastily that his chair tumbled down.

At this point of the conversation Mr. Hughes returned, panting with the haste he had made. It was not necessary for me to quit my post of observation. He handed a telegram to Mr. Gardener, who, having glanced at it, said:

‘I am happy to tell you, my dear professor, that the money has not been paid, and no I O U has been presented.’

‘Thank heaven!’ gasped Mr. Schlobach.

‘Anything else, sir?’ inquired Mr. Hughes.

'Yes,' said Mr. Gardener; 'inquire into these two names. Find out whether there is a Captain Bromley, and to what regiment he belongs; and also in what Government office Mr. Richard Everleigh is employed. Curtis in Chancery Lane will give you information, probably.'

Mr. Hughes took the sheet of paper on which the names were written and went out.

'And now what is to be done?' asked Mr. Schlobach.

'Go home and see if the letter has not been replaced in your desk. If it has, I advise you to transfer it to a safer place.'

'And if it has not?'

'Then come and see me again. We may find it necessary to communicate with Scotland Yard.'

'What do you say to advertising in the papers? I will give ten thousand pounds to get that letter back.'

'Ten thousand pounds! That is a tempting offer.'

'I will give it out of the money my friend left me.'

'We will not make the offer yet, at any rate; we may get it at a lower price if we wait. There is still one other chance.'

'What is that?'

'It is just possible that a clever thief, hearing of this affair, has taken the letter, as other thieves take dogs, with a prospect of a reward being offered; it is just likely that if no offer of reward is made he will offer to get the letter from a friend, or in some such roundabout way, for a tenth of what you are willing to pay. For the letter is of no use to anyone now except the future husband of Miss Howard.'

'That is the most sensible thing you have said yet,' exclaimed Mr. Schlobach.

'For my own part,' said Mr. Gardener, 'I think it is the least likely thing that could have happened. I firmly believe—according to the statements you have made—that the letter is in the possession of Mr. Everleigh or Captain Bromley, and I warn you to be careful in your dealings with those gentlemen. Be sure of one thing, that he who has it will move heaven and earth to marry Miss Howard. Who the thief is it is impossible to say. The question of position is nothing—don't be deceived by that. Every day there is evidence in the papers of well-bred men descending to the vilest means of obtaining money. A Government clerk is

usually a gentleman ; an officer is equally a gentleman ; we do not know their pecuniary position. Their word must be taken for nothing. Mr. Everleigh, you say, is careful : that suggests restricted means. If Mr. Everleigh gives up his pretensions to Miss Howard's hand, you may take it for granted that he is as innocent as your heart can wish. Captain Bromley is a soldier. Soldiers, despite their honour, sometimes make the means subjective to an end which interest leads them to believe is good and just. He may wish to get his more advanced rival out of the field, and justify the abstraction of this letter by the reflection that when he has married Miss Howard it will be hers—and his. Again, sir, I say watch them closely, and beware of the more successful. You must use more than your customary caution, or *you will find too late that Miss Howard has married the wrong man.*'

CHAPTER V

CONTINUED FROM THE NARRATIVE OF THOMAS CRAIK.

'You had better wire me this evening,' said Mr. Gardener to Professor Schlobach, as they shook hands on parting at the office door. The simple old gentleman looked perplexed, and repeated the words as if he doubted his hearing. 'Send me a telegram, you know,' explained Mr. Gardener, 'telling me whether you have found the lost letter, or discovered any clue to the mystery of its loss.'

Mr. Schlobach promised to do this ; but up to the time of closing the office no telegram had been handed in.

If Mr. Gardener's supposition that it had been extracted from the secret drawer from curiosity, and would be replaced, should be verified, there was an end of the matter ; but if it should not, then there was the beginning of a fine career for a poor young man. And when I thought of the exciting vicissitudes attending the discovery of the theft, the keen struggle to outwit the thief and gain possession of the stolen letter, the substantial reward in addition to the moral triumph which would crown success, I sincerely wished that the worst fears of Mr. Gardener and his client had

been realized by the dishonesty of Mr. Everleigh or Captain Bromley.

For I resolved I would win the prize if it were to be won, and there was nothing remarkable in this decision; for here was I with my week's warning half expired, a strong love of adventure, no squeamish scruples worth speaking of, a hearty detestation of office work, with nothing whatever to lose by my undertaking, and everything to gain.

I slept little that night for thinking of the lost letter, and got to the office just after the first postal delivery.

Mr. Hughes kept the key of the letter-box; but those are extraordinary locks which I cannot open with an iron skewer, and that on the letter-box was of the simplest kind. So in about a minute and a half I had out the packet of letters, and turned them over quickly, on the look-out for a buff envelope. There it was—a telegram. With a little water and patience I raised the flap without injury, and then I picked out the telegram.

<i>' From</i>	<i>To MR. GARDENER,</i>
WILHELM SCHLOBACH.	Solicitor,
Faulcondale.	Pump Court, London.

'The letter was not in the drawer as you expected, and it is not anywhere in my house, I am sure. I have not found out anything about anybody, but everything is just as it was. What is to be done now?'

'Thank heaven!' thought I. 'Mr. Everleigh or Captain Bromley is a thief.'

I replaced the telegram, gummed and closed the envelope, returned it with the rest of the letters to the letter-box, and locked it up securely.

Soon after Mr. Gardener's arrival, he sent me to the post-office, with this wire addressed to Professor Schlobach:

'Wait a week. The letter may be offered to you on more reasonable terms than you are prepared to offer. I find that the statements made by "R. E." (Richard Everleigh), and "V. B." (Valentine Bromley), with regard to their positions, are technically correct.'

In my dinner-hour I bought paper and envelopes, and wrote this letter to Mr. Schlobach:

‘*June 20, 1883.*

‘SIR,

‘I am informed that you are willing to pay ten thousand pounds for the recovery of a letter addressed to Miss Dorothea Howard, signed by the late Mr. Digby Howard, and containing an order for the payment of I O U. If you will send me by return of post a written note of agreement to that effect, I will undertake to restore the said letter to you within the space of twelve months from this date.

‘Address your reply to “X., Post-office, New Church Road, Camberwell.”’

I posted this letter on Thursday afternoon. On Saturday the young woman at the Camberwell post-office handed me a letter in reply to my inquiries. I seized it eagerly, and was about to leave the desk when, still looking over the letters, she said :

‘Wait a bit ; I think there’s another for you.’

I turned back, and she handed me a second letter. The writing was not in the same hand ; I fancied one of the two was intended for another X. ; however, that was no business of mine, ‘and,’ thought I, ‘if another person has chosen the same signature as mine, he must put up with the consequences.’ So I went off with my two letters.

The first I opened—guided by the peculiarity of the writing—was from Mr. Schlobach ; he said :

‘It is all right ; I will give ten thousand pounds for the letter, according to the terms of your requirement. But I shall be much obliged, and will ask no questions and do my best to think you took the letter by mistake, if you will let me have it at once instead of in twelve months. I sign myself,

‘WILHELM SCHLOBACH.’

I could have sung with delight as I put this simple old man’s letter into my pocket. But I now thought of the other letter, which I proceeded to open, and found to my astonishment that it was meant for me.

Here are the exact words :

‘If X. wants to discover the person who stole a letter

from the secret drawer of a desk in the study of Professor Schlobach, of Faulcondale, he will do well to put on an old coat, and an abject expression, and ask for employment at Beauchamp Moat, six miles east of Faulcondale, where Dr. Norman is in need of a laboratory assistant.'

This letter puzzled me extremely. There was neither address nor signature, but I found that it bore the same postmark as the professor's letter. At first I was inclined to think that the professor, if not the writer, was the author of this letter, and that he wished to assist me in the recovery of the letter by putting me on the track of the person he most suspected; but when I came to consider the simple, stupid character of the old German, I abandoned that idea. I then weighed the probabilities of its being written by one of his neighbours or by the police in search of a cat's-paw; but at length I came to the conclusion that it had come from some person who had witnessed the theft, or had strong foundation for suspicion, and yet from fear or some such sentiment dared not openly accuse the thief. It was most reasonable to suppose that this timid witness was a woman, and an inmate of Mr. Schlobach's house. Possibly it was Miss Howard herself who wrote. Whoever it was, I must get to find out what she or he knew. That was a pleasure to come. For the present I had information of the most useful and gratifying kind. There could be no doubt about the person indicated by the writer of this letter. The thief must be Captain Bromley. He, as I learnt from Mr. Schlobach's statement, was now staying at Beauchamp Moat. But for this letter, I might have spent many fruitless weeks in settling which was the guilty party—Captain Bromley or Mr. Everleigh.

Mr. Gardener had not provided himself with an under-clerk in my place, and in paying me my week's salary on Saturday afternoon was good enough to hint that if I promised to behave better I might return to my post on Monday morning, and I had the supreme satisfaction of declining his offer.

On Sunday morning I took my best clothes to the rag fair in Houndsditch, and sold them for the best price I could get, thereby, as it appeared to me, imitating the conduct of that general who destroyed the bridges behind his

advancing army. In the evening I packed up all that was left of my effects in a handkerchief, and went to bed early. On Monday morning I left London by the 5.15 train, and arrived at Barstow a little after 11. At the station I learnt that I must pass through Faulcondale to get to Beauchamp Moat.

This suited me exactly, and I started off with the hope that I might kill two birds with one stone.

Following the road according to direction, I was within half a mile of Faulcondale, when whom did I see coming towards me but the old professor! I knew him at once, although he was dressed in a gay suit of brown holland and a straw hat, and his wig was in full curl. He was seated in a ramshackle old chaise, drawn by a thick-legged brown cob, beside a handsomely-dressed young lady, who held the reins. She certainly was the most beautiful young lady I have ever seen off the stage, and I settled at once that this must be Miss Howard. I never saw such splendid eyes, nor a prouder look; she drove right in the middle of the road, as if it all belonged to her. On the front seat facing her was a thin old lady.

I stepped out quicker than ever, for I thought that if the family was going to Barstow, and had left the servant at home, I should have the best chance in the world of picking up something useful. I soon got to the village, and having found out which was the professor's house, I went to the gate and pulled the bell. A plump young woman with a face as round and rosy as an apple came to the gate.

'If you please, miss,' said I, 'is Mr. Schlobach in?'

'No,' said she, shaking her simple head, 'he have just gone off in the shay to Barstow.'

I told her I was very sorry to hear that, as I had walked all the way from Barstow on purpose to see him, and perhaps he'd gone there to see me, as I had been informed that he wanted a young fellow to look after a pony and chaise.

She opened her mouth wide enough for me to see about three inches of her tongue as she listened to this story; when I had done she shook her thick head again, and said she had not heard anything at all about it.

'It must be true,' said I, 'or else they wouldn't have told me so at Barstow, so I will sit down and wait till the kind gentleman comes back.'

She seemed to hesitate about asking me in, but when I told her in a whining tone that I had lost my mother and father, all doubts about my respectability were banished from her mind, and she told me I might come and sit down in the kitchen, where she gave me part of her dinner and a glass of ale.

I taught her how to answer her wishes with a halfpenny hung in a tumbler at the end of a long hair, and the innocent girl became so engrossed in this simple pastime that I might have rifled the place and gone off with the booty without obstruction from her. When by these simple means I had entirely won her confidence, I asked her about her place, and whether she got many presents from the visitors. She said she did not get much, but a Captain Bromley had given her half a crown, and Mr. Everleigh gave her a shilling once.

'I reckon the gentleman who gave you the half-crown comes pretty often,' said I.

'Oh no, he don't,' she replied. 'Captain Bromley's only been once; but Mr. Everleigh, he's come four or five times. He was here o' Friday, but he didn't give me anything, because he ain't a-coming any more. What shall I wish now?'

'Wish you may get another half-crown next time Captain Bromley comes,' said I, and, as she carefully proceeded to test the result of this wish, I asked, 'Why ain't Mr. Everleigh a-coming here no more?'

'Because his brother's bust a bloodvessel, and he has got to be took out of London. There, it struck once! that means "Yes," don't it?'

'Yes, but you'd better put it aside now,' said I—seeing there was little to be got out of her while she was playing this game—'or it may strike again, and then you won't get your half-crown.'

She put the halfpenny in her pocket quickly, and then I led her on to talk of the robbery, and from her guileless remarks I learnt that nothing concerning the theft had been discovered, and that no one in that house suspected anyone. She showed me the professor's study. The window was not above a yard from the ground, and there was no fastening to the sash, so that it would have been the easiest thing imaginable to enter the room from the garden in the night

or in the day either, if there were no better guardian about than this simple maid.

When I had learned all that the girl had to tell, I asked where Captain Bromley was now, putting the question for a pretext to get off before the return of the professor.

'At Beechams Moat,' she replied.

'Beechams Moat!' I exclaimed; 'is that far from here?'

'About three or four miles,' said she.

'Because,' said I, 'I was told I might get a place there if your master didn't want me, and to be on the safe side I'll walk on there now I'm rested, and come back again if that place don't suit me. Any way, I shall come and see you again, and if you're a good girl, I'll walk out with you on Sundays.'

She thanked me prettily, and we parted.

Reflecting on what I had heard as I walked to the Moat, I formed a pretty clear idea of Mr. Everleigh. That he was a mean man was clear. I pictured him as one of those needy clerks who spend all they get in keeping up a position above their means in London Society. He had been anxious to marry Miss Howard when that marriage was likely to make him wealthy: but now that such a marriage could only tax his scant fortune to support a wife accustomed to ease and elegance, he took the first excuse to back out. But though he could not gratify his own wishes, he entertained a mean envy of him who could, and was willing, if possible, to ruin his chance by throwing suspicion upon him. For I now concluded that the anonymous note had come from Mr. Everleigh—his last visit being on a Friday, the very day on which the letter must have been posted at Barstow to reach me on Saturday. There was reason to suppose that the professor had given him the particulars of his interview with Mr. Gardener, and probably shown him my letter as well; possibly he had carried Mr. Schlobach's letter to the post, and had got the idea of writing to me from that. They had both been posted at the same office and at the same time; had he posted his own in London, it would have thrown suspicion on him in the event of inquiry; whereas, but for the information given to me by the maid Eliza, I should have continued to believe that either Miss Howard or the old lady, Miss Trevor, was the author.

I found it was nearer six miles than four to Beauchamp

Moat, and despite the pleasant occupation of my mind, I was very much fatigued when I arrived there.

It was the quietest old place I have ever seen.

Some workmen were patching up a tumble-down bridge that crossed the ditch surrounding the house, which was built in the form of a square, more like an almshouse than anything else.

I asked for Dr. Norman, and was told to go through the gateway into a kind of courtyard, where some gardeners were arranging a flower-bed.

A lady and gentleman were looking on. I knew Captain Bromley at a glance.

There was no mistaking him; he looked every inch a soldier. The lady, I thought, might be the doctor's wife, and I was right.

I went up to them and said that I had heard that Dr. Norman wanted a young man.

'I heard Norman tell the carrier that he wanted an assistant,' said Mrs. Norman to Captain Bromley. 'But,' she added timidly, 'he is engaged in the laboratory—what are we to do?'

'That's easy enough,' replied Captain Bromley, beckoning a girl who was crossing the court. He took an envelope from his pocket, wrote a few words on it with a pencil, and gave it to the girl, pointing at the same time to a side of the square distinguished from the others by three tall windows. The girl, as I found afterwards, was deaf and dumb; her name was Martha.

After despatching her on this errand, Captain Bromley turned his back upon me and strolled carelessly across the courtyard with Mrs. Norman. He little knew that I had come there to hunt him down and bring him to justice.

In a few minutes the girl returned, beckoned to me, and led me into the house and through a stone-paved corridor into an empty room, which might at one time have been used as a prison, judging by the small, heavily-barred windows, the gloom and the musty smell of it. At the further end was an old door, crossed with the ironwork of two enormous hinges, and studded with rusty nails.

She knocked and motioned me to go in; at the same time a voice within cried, 'Come in.'

I entered the laboratory.

It was a large room, like a chapel, paved with tiles. The timbers of the roof, black with smoke and dust, were visible overhead. On the right, high up from the ground, were two round windows; on the left were the three tall ones I had seen from the court, furnished with green blinds which were drawn down; a long bench of new wood ran along the wall on the right, with crucibles and glass things standing on it. Above, under the round windows, was a shelf filled with bottles. On the left, between the tall windows, were two bookcases full of books great and small.

In the centre was a table on which stood a reading-lamp, a microscope, and some surgical cases; a square of thick carpet covered the tiles there. Not far from the table stood an odd-shaped stove; a big stove-pipe was carried up slantwise and through one of the round windows. A book was open on the table, and in front of it sat Dr. Norman in an elbow-chair.

He was reading; the envelope with the written message sent in by Captain Bromley lay on the table beside his book. I went up and stood in front of the table. He was so interested in his book that he did not raise his eyes for some minutes, so I had time to form an opinion of my future master.

He was quite a young man, twenty-eight I should say, at the outside; he looked a little like a Jew, still more, I thought, like one of a troupe of Hindoo jugglers that I saw once at the Westminster Aquarium, his skin being sallow, his nose hooked, and his eyebrows and hair jet black. His beard was clipped short to his face. He wore a pair of gold-rimmed eye-glasses.

Coming to the end of the chapter, he took up the envelope, laid it between the pages, and closed the book; then, setting his elbows on the arms of the chair, he leaned back and looked straight at me, without saying a word for half a minute. He seemed short-sighted, and half closed his eyes, throwing back his head to get a fair look at me through his glasses. He was just as much a student as Captain Bromley was a soldier.

'I am told, sir, you want a young man,' said I humbly.

'Who told you?' he asked.

'A gentleman—I think he is a carrier at the village—Faulcondale, I fancy it is called.'

'You look like a Londoner; what have you been doing?'

'I am a Londoner, sir; I have had no regular employment, but I'm handy at most things. I broke my ribs, sir'—I saw it was no use talking to him about my father and mother—'so I couldn't do any hard labour, as I should like to; but gentlemen have been kind to me and given me light work now and then—sending me with messages and such-like. Mr. Brooks, sir, the doctor in the Westminster Bridge Road, he said I ought to go in the country, and as I had an uncle, sir, at Barstow, I went there. But my uncle is dead, sir, so what I'm to do I don't know, unless I can find some kind gentleman to give me employment. I am willing and careful, and I could learn without giving you much trouble, sir.'

'You can do what you are told to do?'

'Oh yes, sir.'

'You know how to hold your tongue?'

'As to that, sir, you may depend on me. I have often been employed by gentlemen on little affairs of a private nature, and I've always given satisfaction; I couldn't have got on otherwise with three ribs broke, sir.'

'I see you are intelligent, and that is a great thing,' said the doctor impressively; 'what wages do you want?'

'Whatever I'm worth, sir, to you. I leave it all to you, sir.'

'Good. I will pay you in proportion to your usefulness. And with your intelligence you may make yourself very useful.'

He spoke with emphasis, and never took his eyes off me. I saw he knew I was telling lies, and liked me none the less for it; and seeing that, it was clear to me at once that he wanted me for some other purpose than assisting in the laboratory.

'What is your name?' he asked, pushing back his chair, and rising.

'Peters, sir,' said I; 'William Peters.'

He bade me follow him, and led me to a small room adjoining the laboratory, in which was a truckle-bed, a chair, a table, and a washstand; this, he told me, should be my room. He then took me back to the laboratory, told me how I was to keep it in order, and then sent me into the kitchen to get some food.

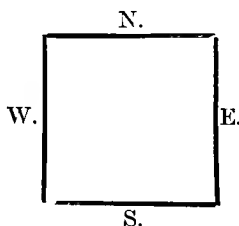
It was necessary to be careful with a man like Dr. Norman. I had to do with one who was as sharp as myself. If he discovered my object in getting into his service, I should lose my place at once. I must for the present let Captain Bromley alone; the first thing was to please my master, and ensure my position. To do this I must discover what purpose he had in view when he hinted so pointedly at my making myself useful.

I was not long in discovering that; and a pretty purpose it was.

CHAPTER VI.

CONTINUED FROM THE NARRATIVE OF THOMAS CRAIK.

To comprehend the events that took place at Beauchamp Moat House, it is necessary to understand the house itself; and this can easily be done. I will draw a square, and mark the four sides with the four points of the compass—so:



These sides will represent the building, the square enclosed the courtyard. The side marked N. was the old chapel used as a laboratory, with a small room adjoining it, which might have been a vestry, and that now served as my bedroom; the side E., in dilapidation and unused, was boarded off from the rest of the building; the side S. was composed of two stories, with a stable and coach-house on the ground-floor, and some empty rooms above; the side W. was also composed of two floors. A gateway passed through the centre of this wing and underneath the upper story. On the north side of this gateway was a sitting-room, on the south a dining-room. Beyond the dining-room were the kitchen, scullery, etc.;

beyond the sitting-room were some rooms filled with lumber; then came the prison-like room that opened into the laboratory. A corridor ran beside the rooms, and opened upon two staircases leading to the upper story, one on the north, and the other on the south side of the gateway.

Of the upper rooms, one in the north-west angle was occupied by Dr. Norman as a sleeping-room; another at the same end was Mrs. Norman's room; a small room over the gateway was used by Martha, the servant, and beyond this was the visitor's room, now devoted to Captain Bromley. Besides the chambers I have mentioned, there were several others unfurnished. All were small and dark.

The first thing I remarked was that Dr. Norman and his wife were on bad terms—that is to say, there was an utter absence of affection, or even of ordinary friendship, between them. They never quarrelled, but, on the other hand, they never conversed. He seemed to have the utmost contempt for her, she the greatest fear of him. When she had to speak to him upon domestic affairs, her question was put with fear and trembling, and his answer was given in the briefest form, and with cold indifference. He spent the whole day in the laboratory, only leaving it to take his meals in the dining-room, or with the ostensible purpose of going to his bed-chamber. He had his room, she hers; they never went out together. When he met her in the presence of Captain Bromley, he exerted himself to be agreeable to him; but he never included his wife in the remarks he made, but spoke absolutely as though she did not exist. Not once did he accompany them in the walks they took. Yet interest of a certain kind he took in Mrs. Norman, and scarcely a movement escaped his observation.

The blinds of the three windows in the laboratory were constantly drawn. In one of these was a small hole, seemingly burnt by a cigarette. When the voices of Mrs. Norman and Captain Bromley were heard in the court, he would rise from the table and go to this hole, watching them long and patiently. When they left the court, he would quit the laboratory as if to go to his room; but I soon saw that it was but a pretext to pass along the corridor by the door of the sitting-room.

He wore felt slippers that were noiseless, and peeping through the door of the laboratory, I have seen him standing

in an angle of the lumber-room, and by the door of the dining-room. When they went out together into the woods, he would give me a list of herbs and roots that I was to go and look for, saying, with a significant expression, that I might take my time, as there was nothing to do in the laboratory.

We understood each other before the end of the week. He was jealous of his wife, hated her, and wanted to get rid of her, and he employed me to collect evidence against her. I was a quick-witted and a willing tool in his hands. But we both kept up a decent pretence of ignoring the reality. Knowing what was wanted of me, I watched Mrs. Norman and Captain Bromley closely—more closely than Dr. Norman imagined; for my observation served a double purpose, and I was quite as anxious as the doctor to find that a liaison existed between them. For if, as I concluded, Captain Bromley had the letter, he would certainly attempt to marry Miss Howard—since only by that marriage could he profit by his theft. But if at the right moment I could surreptitiously convey evidence showing his attachment to Mrs. Norman, the marriage, which would defeat my object, would be at any rate postponed, and so give me more time to get at the letter. And so when I was sent out to search for herbs, my first object was to find Mrs. Norman and Captain Bromley, and I invariably succeeded; and I watched them as a cat watches fish in a globe. The doctor examined my collection very closely when I returned—roots tugged up haphazard and herbs gathered pell-mell—and pretended indifference when I mentioned that I had met or seen or heard Captain Bromley and Mrs. Norman on the way, and gave him particulars of my observations; but I knew by the money he gave me at the end of the week that I had not disappointed his expectations. The sum of my discoveries in the first few weeks was small, perhaps, but sufficient to prove to my entire satisfaction that Captain Bromley was a villain.

I don't mean to say that he was bad enough to suit the Surrey Theatre; but he was of that kind found about once a month in the Divorce Court—a fine, handsome fellow, indolent and careless, with nothing on earth to do but to amuse himself. I have seen him kiss her when they met in the morning; I have seen him walking with his arm

about her waist ; but these signs of affection were slight in comparison with hers—not that she was at the time guilty of any culpable action, but that there was in her manner evidence of a passion far deeper than his. She laid herself out to please him, and when her efforts seemed to have escaped his careless observation, she redoubled them. She suited herself to his tastes ; what he liked she liked ; what displeased him displeased her. Even when he left her to go out alone, she concealed her regret that he might not find her troublesome ; and though her expression in his absence was marked by anxiety and impatience, there was nothing but joyful welcome in her face when he returned.

But the most convincing proof that he was playing a double game lay in the fact that at the very time he was philandering with her he was paying his addresses to Miss Howard—covertly.

He never took Mrs. Norman to Faulcondale, nor did he bring Miss Howard to the Moat. It was a mystery to me how he kept the two apart ; but that he did so showed a great amount of address—not to call it cunning. He went to Faulcondale two or three times a week. I followed him there several times ; and finding means to get some private conversation with Eliza, I learnt from her that Miss Doris and the Captain were, to use her own words, ‘ a-sweethearting like anything.’

This gave me much anxiety, and I saw that one of two things must be done immediately. The letter must be obtained, or an impediment thrown in the way of a marriage between Miss Howard and Captain Bromley. This latter course was not to be rashly entered upon, since it would inevitably involve an imbroglio fatal to those means of investigation which the present condition of things favoured. The alternative was hazardous in a less degree ; and now, having assured myself of Dr. Norman’s favour, I determined to make an attempt without further delay to get possession of the letter.

The letter was stolen between the 17th and 18th of June, the date—as I learnt from Martha, the deaf and dumb girl, through the finger signs, in which I was pretty efficient—that Mr. Bromley had arrived at the Moat ; since then he had been nowhere except to Lipley and Orwell, which is close by, with Mrs. Norman, and to Faulcondale alone.

Hence I concluded that the stolen letter must be at Beauchamp Moat.

Captain Bromley's baggage consisted of a portmanteau, a Gladstone bag, and a dressing-case. In none of these would he be likely to conceal so valuable a treasure as a letter worth a quarter of a million of money. The probability was that he guarded it in a secret pocket, in a belt, or some such contrivance, from which it might be removed and put under his pillow at night. Where he kept it was the first thing to discover. To do this his room must be entered while he slept; and that, again, necessitated a clear knowledge of his room, and how to get into it after his door was locked.

I watched my opportunity, and on the afternoon when the Captain and Mrs. Norman had gone over to Orwell in the gig, to take tea with Dr. Bullen, I went to my master and said in my humble tone :

'If you please, sir, I see that the hook as fastens back Captain Bromley's bedroom window is hanging by one screw. If there comes a high wind, it'll be wrenched off and smash the glass, perhaps.'

'Do you think you can set it to rights?' he asked carelessly, without looking up from his book.

'Yes, sir, with a hammer and a nail,' I replied.

'Then go and do it; but don't be more than half an hour; I want you to go over to Lipleigh for some glass tube.'

'Right, sir,' said I, and up I ran to Captain Bromley's room with hammer and nails.

The first thing I did as I opened the door was to look at the fastening, and to my dismay I found that it was not fastened with a lock. Locks I understood thoroughly, but a latch which fastens on the inside with a wedge thrust between the catch and the clasp no man can pick by any ingenuity. I seated myself on the window-sill, and as tinkered the loose hook, I examined the inside of the room and set my wits to work.

There was no chimney. The window was fifteen feet from the ground, and there was nothing like a ladder in the place. The only way I could see of being in the room when Captain Bromley was asleep, was to get into it before he fastened the door.

The furniture consisted of an iron bedstead, a wash-

stand, a toilet-table, and a couple of chairs. Between the toilet-table and the wall lay the portmanteau and the Gladstone bag.

The bed first struck me as being the best place of concealment. There was a valance to it, and ample room beneath it for a man larger than me to lie. I reflected that a man like the Captain would not be likely to look under the bed before lying down. Only women and cowards do that. But then I thought that, thieves being more or less cowardly, Captain Bromley might take the precaution to lift the valance. I didn't like that idea. Still fiddling the hook about, I looked all round the room for another hiding-place. There was no wardrobe or cupboard. Then my eyes fell on the toilet-table. That also had a valance of pink chintz covered with muslin. The space beneath was small indeed, but for a small man who had undergone some education as an acrobat——

I finished the hook, and tried the toilet-table. Sitting on my heels and tucking in my head, I could just manage to find room without touching the chintz. 'This will do,' thought I; 'nobody thinks of looking under the toilet-table.' I made a triangular rent in the chintz on a level with my eye, and, drawing down the corner, got a view of the bed and three sides of the room through the muslin. I replaced the stuff and crawled out. The tear was not noticeable from the outside. I was well satisfied.

Fearing Dr. Norman would suspect me, I picked up my hammer and nails, and ran down to the laboratory. My master wrote an order for the glass tube, gave me half a crown to pay for it, and sent me off to Lipley—a distance of six miles.

I was pretty well tired out when I returned, but after tea my spirits revived, and I resolved to make the attempt that very night.

At nine o'clock Dr. Norman left the laboratory, telling me I could go to bed when I pleased. I went into my room, took off my boots, and five minutes later put out the light.

I crossed the laboratory in my stocking feet, passed through the lumber-room, and crept along the corridor to the staircase—slipping quickly from corner to corner, and not quitting one place of safety before I had fixed upon the next.

It was comparatively light, being only in the early days of July; indeed, there was more light than I wished for. However, I got without accident to the top of the stairs, and there I felt safe. I heard the maid's step at the other end of the passage, where a light showed that she was in Mrs. Norman's room. I slipped like an eel into Captain Bromley's room, and in a minute was sitting on my heels under the toilet-table. Presently Martha came along the passage, the light grew stronger, and she entered the room. Through the triangular rent I saw her turn down the bed, delightfully unconscious that I was watching her. She looked round the room to see if anything else was to be done, and then went away. This augured well.

I stretched my legs out, and sat there patiently until midnight, when the opening of a door below, and the sound of voices, warned me to be on the alert. I drew in my legs, sat on my heels, cramped myself together, and felt cautiously around to be sure that the chintz fell all right.

I dared scarcely breathe; my heart seemed to be in my throat as the door opened, and a flood of pink light came through the chintz. For a time I had no thought but to hold myself still and control my breathing; but as I heard the jingle of keys on a ring, and the click of a lock, I ventured cautiously to pull down the triangle of chintz and put my eye to the opening. Captain Bromley was seated at the foot of the bed; he had the Gladstone bag on his knees. His examination was finished; he closed the bag, turned the key, dropped the bag on the floor beside his chair, and, rising, slipped the keys into his pocket, humming a tune.

He moved; I lost sight of him; I could see nothing, and the next moment the chintz touched my face, and the toe of his boot under the valance was within an inch of my fingers. I ceased breathing, for I thought it was all up with me. But it was a false alarm. I heard his collar fall on the table, and then the sound of his watch being wound up. Then he moved away, still humming, and I looked again through the rent in the valance. He was slipping his watch under the pillow. After that he threw off his clothes carelessly upon a chair, blew out the light, and I heard a rustle of bedclothes, and all was silent.

I waited until I heard him breathing deeply and regu-

larly; then I slowly and carefully uncurled myself, and slipped inch by inch from under the table.

It was not dark, although twelve had struck. I could see the position of everything in the room. With the utmost caution I crept along the wall, raised the latch, and set the door wide open. I had to pass the bed to get at the chair on which the Captain had flung his clothes.

I crawled past on my hands and knees, lest, waking, he might catch sight of me against the window. And now the delicate work of searching the clothes began. Everything depended on address—and luck. The slightest accident might alarm the sleeper and entail discovery—a pencil dropping from a pocket, a coin rolling upon the floor. Inch by inch I separated the articles of clothing and got them safely on to the ground. Then, listening with every movement, to be sure that there was no alteration in Captain Bromley's breathing, I spread out his jacket and slid my hands into the pockets. I don't know whether the night was particularly light, or whether my intense excitement gave additional sensitiveness to my eyesight; but certain it is that, independent of my sense of touch, I distinguished clearly the nature of the papers I got out of the pockets. There were several letters, but they were stamped; that which I was after had none, I knew. I didn't for a moment expect the letter to be in these pockets, and amongst other papers. Careless as Captain Bromley was, such a piece of foolhardiness was not to be hoped for. It was scarcely worth the risk to look there; but at the same time no possibility could be neglected. I searched every pocket, replacing the things—each as I proceeded, and in the order I had found them.

Then I proceeded to a systematic and close examination of the clothing apart from the pockets. And here my hopes lay; I hoped to find, somewhere between the cloth and the lining, a sewn packet. I took each vestment, and, doubling the material, I rolled it between my thumb and finger in all its length and breadth. I even went so far as to make a like investigation of his shirt and neck-scarf. There was nothing there. I was disappointed, but not disheartened, nor in any way shaken in my belief. I only entertained a higher opinion of Captain Bromley—as a thief.

The clock in the kitchen had struck three when I gave up

my long and patient search as hopeless in that direction, and I carefully restored the clothing to its original position on the chair.

Once only the Captain had moved; but the day was coming on, the light growing stronger, and every movement I made was fraught with greater danger.

I ought to have abandoned my search for that night at this point; but I was like a gambler, tempted to play on in the face of ruin. Kneeling beside the chair, I revolved in my mind what I might yet do before going.

I have heard of thieves who daily change their place of hiding, lest that which escaped search to-day may be looked into to-morrow. Captain Bromley was clever enough for that, and the letter, though not in his clothes now, might be next time I got a chance of searching. I glanced at the window, and my heart quaked as I saw how faintly the few remaining stars twinkled in the gray sky. Then, turning my eyes to the Gladstone bag which I had seen him closing the very last thing before going to bed, a desperate resolution seized me to look into that before giving up my search.

It was on the other side of the room, and I must again pass between the bed and the window.

I got the keys out of his pocket, taking one after the other into my hands to avoid sound, and, clasping them tight in the palm of my hand, began to crawl past the bed. Turning my eyes towards the pillow, I distinctly saw the sleeper's face, gray in that half-light. At that very moment I heard a movement at the window, and a rattle of the iron hook that held open the lattice window. I dared not stir, but stopped there rigid—even to the hair of my head—with my eyes fixed on the sleeper's face.

'Chip, chip, chip, chip, chip, chip, tswe—e!' This was the sound that came from a sparrow, a swallow, or some such idiotic bird, that had settled right in the open window; and it seemed to my ear loud enough to be heard on the other side of the parish.

Captain Bromley's breathing changed with a little jerk; he closed his lips and parted them, and again that cry came from the window:

'Chip, chip, chip, chip, chip, chip, chip, tswe—e!'

I declare his eyes opened, and then he threw up his

shoulder and turned his face from the light. I never in my life felt such heartfelt gratitude.

The movement had frightened the bird away, and now, rendered bold by my escape, I crossed to the bag, unlocked it with one of the keys on the ring, and opened it. I slid my hand down on the right side, and then on the left, with my fingers spread out, and passing from end to end of the lining. There was a pocket in the left side for letters; it was empty, but below I felt something that lay between the lining and the leather. I lifted the flaps of the pocket, and slid my fingers inside; there was a slit in the lining close under the flap wide enough for my four fingers to pass. There *was* a letter there; I got hold of the edge of it between my second and third fingers, and drew it up carefully through the slit. One glance was enough to fill me with a wild feeling of triumph—it was unstamped!

I held it so that the light fell upon it, and read these words:

‘DOROTHEA HOWARD.

(To be opened after her marriage, and not before.)’

The blood tingled and throbbed in my veins, and for the first time I lost my head. An unguarded movement caused me to drop the keys upon the floor. The jingle was not half so loud as the call of the bird in the window, and had I kept perfectly still all would have been well; but at that moment I was unsettled by my success, and thinking only of saving what I had won at such hazard and with such good luck, I bolted for the door. I heard a cry and a heavy footfall as I got into the passage, but I was down the stairs and in the corridor before the ‘pat, pat, pat’ of his naked feet on the bare boards of the passage fell on my ear.

I shot past the sitting-room, through the lumber-rooms and the laboratory, and getting to my own little cell, I stripped off my clothes in a minute and slid into bed, still holding the precious paper in my hand.

CHAPTER VII.

FROM THE NARRATIVE OF THE REV. DR. BULLEN.

IN the first week of August Captain Bromley asked me to take lunch with him at the George—an excellent hotel at Lipley—and this invitation I accepted with pleasure, for I liked the young gentleman, and I have no distaste to a good lunch now and then.

It was now six weeks since I had first become acquainted with him, and having in that time had ample opportunity for examining his character, I found no reason to change the pleasant opinion our first interview had created. He was open and truthful, simple as a child; but this did not blind me to the danger of Mrs. Norman, and the harm that might arise from the very innocence of their relations. So I resolved that we should not part on this occasion before I had spoken out my mind.

We had a most excellent lunch and a capital bottle of port after it; and that being finished, I proposed that we should go over to the Moat together and take a cup of tea with Mrs. Norman, after which it would be nothing but a pleasant walk home for me in the fresh of the evening.

Accordingly we got into the gig, and when we had settled down into our places and were jogging along, I began my attack.

‘Well, my friend,’ said I, ‘when do you think of leaving the Moat?’

‘Upon my honour, I can’t tell you,’ said he lightly. ‘I came to stay five or six days; I have been here as many weeks, and in all probability I shall stay as many more.’

‘I think not, sir,’ said I, quietly knocking the ash off my cigar—as good a cigar as ever I wish to smoke.

He looked at me, laughing, but seeing I was as grave as a judge, he became instantly serious himself.

‘Why not?’ he asked.

‘Because you ought not to stay,’ said I.

He reflected a moment, as if inquiring of himself what duty he had neglected, and he repeated his former question:

‘Why not?’

‘On Mrs. Norman’s account,’ I replied.

'Why, 'tis precisely on her account that I am staying,' said he, in a tone of surprise.

'I know it. But it is, nevertheless, for her sake that you should go away.'

'Upon my word, I don't understand you!' said he, after another pause.

'Mrs. Norman has changed in a remarkable manner since you first brought her to see me.'

'Thank heaven, she has!'

'Thank heaven, say I, if she has more strength to overcome the difficulties that beset her. Come, sir, tell me to what cause you attribute her alteration.'

'To a variety of causes. Let us set the friendship of an amiable and indulgent divine at the top of the list——'

'And underneath,' said I, 'certain comforts in the form of furniture and decorative surroundings with which you have provided her—after that?'

'After that,' said Captain Bromley in a graver tone, 'I should attribute all to an earnest and persevering endeavour to stimulate her husband's affection and command his respect.'

'Why, this is good news,' cried I, delighted with this unexpected turn; 'tell me all about it, sir, for as I have never yet had the good fortune to see Dr. Norman, I have been in ignorance of what has passed between him and his wife.'

'Unfortunately, there is very little to tell you,' said he. 'When Edith told me about the unhappy estrangement between her husband and herself, I suggested that possibly she herself was partly to blame, and that, had she studied to please him, she might have won back his affection.'

'Why, that was well said!' I exclaimed.

'I pointed out to her,' continued Captain Bromley, 'how susceptible we men are to the influence of little things, and told her how much happier I felt in her society now she was brightly dressed and lively in mood than when I found her dowdy and dull. I give you my word, parson,' he added, 'that, with the best intentions in the world, I couldn't have stood much more than a week of it at the Moat, if she had been as dismal and distressing to look at at the end of the week as she was at the beginning.'

'That is perfectly natural,' said I; 'the most unselfish of

us is more anxious to linger in the society of a bright and vivacious woman than beside a poor, dowdy, miserable soul, whose sorrows seem to pray for solitude. Well, sir, and what effect had your remarks upon Mrs. Norman ?

'The best I could have wished for. She eagerly accepted my suggestion, and set herself resolutely to attract her husband. She plucked up courage to speak to him, kissed him in the morning, laid herself out to be entertaining in his presence, and took a sensible view of her position. She went so far as to speculate upon the future, saying that when her husband had made a position for himself, he would be glad to have a bright and attractive wife at the head of his table.'

'Capital, capital !' said I ; 'and how is it working in the other direction—what success have her endeavours had upon her husband ?'

'None at all,' said Captain Bromley bitterly ; 'on the contrary, she seems to have made him only the more morose. Her approaches clearly displease him. His looks say as plain as words, "What does this nonsense mean? You like me no better than I like you; why do you make this scheming pretence of liking me more?"'

My spirits fell to hear this, and my old suspicion returned.

'Her assumed gaiety——' continued Captain Bromley.

'Assumed !' I cried, interrupting him. 'Mrs. Norman's gaiety has not seemed to me unreal, but simply the natural outcome of better health and spirits.'

'It may be so,' said Captain Bromley ; 'at any rate, her gaiety displeases Norman. Her cheerful tone jars upon his senses. Her happiness is displeasing to his jealous temper.'

'You believe he is both jealous and morose?' I asked.

'I am sure of it,' he replied.

'Good heavens, sir !' I cried, 'is Mrs. Norman a fool ?'

'No, certainly not,' he answered with some warmth.

'Then she is blind to a fact which is obvious to you ; and do you think that if her main object in dressing well and assuming a lively bearing is to win her husband's affection, she would persevere in a course which is palpably displeasing to him ?'

'What on earth are you driving at, parson ?'

‘You haven’t answered *my* question yet,’ said I.

‘Well, your reasoning obliges me to accept your view that Mrs. Norman’s gaiety is not forced, but the natural result of better health and spirits.’

‘Can you tell me what had brought her spirits to the deplorable condition they were in when you first brought her to me?’

‘Yes; her husband’s neglect, indifference, and harshness.’

‘And do you attribute the improvement in her spirits to his being rather more harsh now she is gay than when she was sad?’ I waited a minute, and then, as he did not answer, I continued, ‘Come, we will take another side of the question. We have seen that Mrs. Norman’s natural or assumed gaiety remains uninfluenced by her husband’s undisguised displeasure. Has it remained at the same high pitch when you have left her to go to your friends at Faulcondale?’

‘She has tried to conceal disappointment.’

‘She has been disappointed?’

‘That is very natural. She would like to know the people at Faulcondale—she has said so; but she cannot make their acquaintance in defiance of her husband’s expressed wish to the contrary.’

‘That is something to know,’ said I.

‘And now, sir,’ said Captain Bromley, in a tone of irritation, ‘what do you deduct from all this?’

‘This, sir,’ said I; ‘that Mrs. Norman has become dangerously attached to you.’ I saw that I had affronted him, but I continued, ‘Don’t be offended; I speak to you without form or ceremony, as one honest man may speak to another, and you must not resent a little rough treatment in being saved from a perilous position, though it will make no difference to me if you do. It is my duty to speak, and I tell you that your kindness and attentions have awakened a sentiment in Mrs. Norman which is dangerous to her future happiness and to yours.’

He laughed.

‘Why, don’t you know——’ cried he, and then stopped.

‘Yes, I know that she is your foster-sister—a most dangerous relationship. To you, who have possibly set your affections upon another, it may seem impossible that harm should come from your love of a foster-sister; but

Mrs. Norman, who has no such safeguard—do you think it impossible that she should love you?’

‘It is not impossible that she might, but I am confident that she could not look at me with an untroubled face if she did.’

‘That I believe as fully as you do. She may yet conceive that her affection for you is no more than that of a sister for a brother. But it is more, and it is of the greatest importance that you should go at once. That face must not be troubled with the consciousness of an impossible passion.’

‘I think you take an exaggerated view of the case,’ he said in a calmer tone, after some minutes of reflection, which I had been careful not to disturb.

‘I hope I do,’ said I; ‘but we must guard against the possibility of such a grave misfortune. A good many of us, having fallen, turn round angrily to look on the ground behind us for the cause of our accident; but if we had used but a little of that caution in looking ahead we should not have slipped at all. I hope that my suspicion of a still graver complication is also exaggerated.’

He asked me to explain.

‘Tell me,’ said I, ‘do you think Dr. Norman would be glad to get rid of his wife?’

‘Yes, I do. He would gain money by it, and recover a certain amount of liberty which he sacrificed for money.’

‘He is unscrupulous?’

‘Undoubtedly. He professes a cynical contempt for what are called principles, and declares that he, in common with all mankind, is actuated solely by motives of self-interest.’

‘It is not unjust, then,’ said I, ‘to judge him by his own laws. Now, how is his interest served by tolerating your presence under his roof? He has forbidden Mrs. Norman to form acquaintance with her neighbours; he has encouraged you to stay; he has by his harshness compelled his wife to seek sympathy and support from you; he has thrown you together; he has, as it were, instituted a comparison between himself and you to his own disadvantage. What is he to gain—he who does nothing without a motive of self-interest—by this?’

‘Upon my honour,’ he said, ‘I can’t make out, unless——’

He checked himself.

‘Unless,’ I continued, ‘he has foreseen that affection under these terms might ripen into love, and love to a passion that would enable him to cut his bonds with the sword of justice.’

‘Good heavens!’ exclaimed Captain Bromley, ‘can you believe he is such a villain?’

‘I will believe he is a saint,’ said I, ‘if you can prove it by a logical deduction from the premises you have laid down.’

We said not a word after this for a good ten minutes, when we overtook the postman, who, seeing Captain Bromley, took a letter from his bag and handed it up. I held the reins while he opened and read it, and he took them, having read it, and put the letter in my hand for me to read.

It was headed, ‘Fairlawn, Wimbledon,’ and ran as near as I can recollect in these words :

‘MY DEAR SON,

‘The heat of the past weeks has tried me greatly. Dr. Langdon tells me I must go to Scarborough—a long and painful journey for a suffering old woman. Only my dear Val can make it a pleasant one to me. Need I say more?’

‘YOUR LOVING MOTHER.’

I looked at him questioningly as I returned the letter.

‘Providence is on your side, parson,’ said he with a smile.

Mrs. Norman, I fancy, did not know I was in the room when Captain Bromley gave her his mother’s letter to read.

‘Of course you will go, dear?’ she said, when she had read it.

‘Yes,’ said he; ‘there’s a train leaves Barstow soon after nine.’

‘So soon?’ she cried, the colour going out of her face. Then, seeing reproach in his regard, she added penitently, ‘Oh, I am heartless and selfish; I ought to have thought of poor mamma, and not of myself.’

‘What message shall I take from you?’ he asked.

‘I will write a letter,’ she replied; ‘but you can tell her

that you left me bright and happy.' The tears filled her eyes, and her lips quivered as she spoke. 'For, indeed, dear,' she added earnestly, as she dashed away the tears with her handkerchief, 'I mean to be brave, although I don't, perhaps, look so just now; and I mean to be just as light-hearted and strong as if you were here. I am never going to be stupid again.'

I was happy to see that she was as ignorant of her real feelings as the Captain had been. But the nature of those feelings was betrayed later on. She had been looking at the time-table.

'Nine-fifteen,' she said. 'If I order the gig for half-past seven it will be time enough, won't it, dear?'

'Better say half-past six,' said Valentine; 'I shall stop at Faulcondale on my way to say good-bye.'

'Oh yes, you must not forget your new friends,' she said in a tone of forced gaiety, and then, with some confusion, she added, 'I had forgotten them—that is, I—I—I—did not know if you would go by Faulcondale.'

Then she turned away to conceal her shame, for she knew that she was not telling the truth.

CHAPTER VIII.

FROM THE NARRATIVE OF DOROTHEA HOWARD.

WE were taking tea on the lawn under the mulberry-tree, my dear old guardian, Miss Trevor and I, when Eliza, who had been sent to the farm to order the chaise to be prepared, came to us all agape with a letter which she said she had found lying in the middle of the road.

It was addressed to me, and there was no stamp on it. I rose and turned from the table to open it, feeling that my face was betraying a secret which I dared not yet tell even to my professor. For, I knew not why, it struck me that this letter was from Captain Bromley, yet had I considered a moment I should have rejected the notion, because the writing was not that of an accomplished gentleman, but rather of a schoolboy, painfully careful of detail, and because, had the letter been sent by a messenger and been accidentally dropped by him, he could not have failed to

find it, seeing that it lay, Eliza said, right in the middle of the road, and not six yards from the garden-gate. But I had been thinking a good deal about Captain Bromley in the afternoon, and felt a silly kind of presentiment that he would surprise us with a visit some time that day; and so it was, I suppose, that I jumped to the conclusion that this must be a letter from him.

As I opened the letter an enclosed piece of paper fell to the ground. The letter commanded my first attention. There was neither address, date, nor signature. These are the words as I remember them:

‘Beware of Captain Valentine Bromley, now staying at Beauchamp Moat. Your fortune is in his hands. He will, before long, attempt to obtain a legal right to it by making you his wife. The inclosed piece of tissue-paper is cut exactly to the size of the letter stolen by him from the desk of Professor Schlobach on the night of June the 18th, and the writing upon it is traced from the address written by your father. The letter is in his possession. If this evidence does not convince you of his character, and you are still deceived by the flattery and attentions that I am sure he is offering to you, inquire closely into his doings at Beauchamp Moat, and find out what his feelings are towards Mrs. Norman, in whose company his time is chiefly spent.’

I would read no more. I crumpled up the letter in my hand and threw it upon the ground in passionate anger. It was not merely indignation at the aspersion of a friend’s character—it was a less justifiable feeling than that. I was wrong again, as I ever am in my passion. Presently I was seized by a burning curiosity to know the end of the letter, and I took it up and read it to the end.

‘Your only safeguard against becoming the dupe and the victim of a heartless and mercenary scoundrel,’ the letter continued, ‘is to reject any proposal he makes, or at least to postpone your answer until a fair time has been allowed for the recovery of the stolen letter. In a few weeks—perhaps in a few days—further proof of Valentine Bromley’s real character shall be given you.’

‘I will only add one or two facts in support of this present warning. Since Valentine Bromley came to Beauchamp Moat he has spent upwards of three hundred pounds in

dresses and other things for Mrs. Norman. He has taken her often to Lipley, but never to Faulcondale. He has introduced her to a friend who frequently visits them at the Moat-house, but I know well enough that he has never invited you to visit Mrs. Norman, for reasons which you may easily guess.'

As I finished reading my hand dropped by my side with the letter in it. Then I perceived that the professor was standing near me, and regarding me with anxiety.

'What is it, my dear child, eh?' he asked gently.

'Read that,' said I, putting the letter in his hand; and as he was reading I picked up the slip of paper that had fallen out at first, and discovered that the traced writing upon it was exactly like the address upon my father's letter to me, which I had often seen. That increased the rancour in my jealous heart, for it seemed to my blindly prejudiced mind to confirm the worst that had been said against Captain Bromley. And in my estimation the worst was that I had been cheated and duped, not in my fortune, but in my affections. To tell the truth, I never once thought of the possibility that Captain Bromley was a thief. That was too absurd to believe. It did not admit of reasoning. He had not stolen the letter, simply because he could not do such a thing as that; and evidence piled up to the clouds would not have convinced me that he had done so. Yet I was willing to believe at a hint that he had made a play-thing of my heart by pretending a love he did not feel. A clever woman might analyze this fact and show why of two charges I should believe the one and reject the other. I suppose one had to be dealt with by my reason, the other by my sentiments.

I put the slip of paper into the professor's hand as he closed the open sheet. He laid the two together, and with a grunt of contempt tore the two in half, and again, and then again.

'Tell me what it means,' said I.

'It means,' he replied, in a great wrath, 'it means that this is all an infamous *tam* lie—every word of it. And you did well to throw it away from you, but you did not do well to pick it up again.' With that he threw the pieces of paper upon the ground and put his heel upon them. 'What!' he exclaimed, in such anger as I had never before seen, his

smooth face growing crimson, his heavy cheeks shaking with the force of his indignant speech, 'what! shall we believe ill of our friend because his enemy wrongs him? Shall we think an honest man false because a liar speaks falsely of him? and shall we shut our eyes to all that is good, that we may only know what is whispered in our ears? and put our trust in lies and our mistrust in truth? Our friend is the honest man, and the creature who wrote that letter and dared not sign it, he is the villain; and I was a fool——' He paused, and brought out a letter from his inside pocket. 'Look!' said he, showing me the letter, 'it is the same writing—and it is from "X.," and I was a fool to listen to him at first, but be sure I will not listen to him again. He is not very clever, either—this chap! He tells you the letter is in Captain Bromley's hands, and look here—he can put a piece of paper over it and trace the address! Do you think that Captain Bromley lent the letter to this "X." to copy, eh? To be a fool as well as a villain, this dear friend of ours? And do you think if this *dam* clever "X." got the letter from our friend to copy he would give it him back again? It is all nonsense, and silly nonsense as well. This "X." stole the letter, he has never let it go out of his hands, and he has got it now; but he thinks he must make up this story that we may not send him to prison for having robbed us, and that he may get the money I was fool enough to offer him; and then, dropping his voice from its angry pitch to its customary tone of gentleness, he added, 'Don't you see that, my dear?'

'Yes, I see that,' said I, grateful to him for speaking in defence of Captain Bromley.

'Then why do you still look troubled?' he asked.

'I do not know; I cannot answer that question to myself.'

'My poor child,' he said, laying his hand tenderly on my shoulder, 'I think I know, for I myself am troubled;' and he went on to show how any calumny, however false, thrown upon people we love and honour must give us pain. But it was not so easy to explain away the torment from my heart, for I had very little philosophy in my head. But I determined to reason myself into a better frame of mind if I could, so I left him and went down the garden, feeling that I was better alone.

As my ideas fell into order and took form, I felt aggrieved because Captain Bromley had not introduced Mrs. Norman to us—the only fact in the letter that was incontestable, a trifle, indeed, and which I should have been ashamed to think of. But I was jealous, and that explains all. And the more arguments I brought to prove that Captain Bromley was right, the more he seemed wrong, and the more sore this little grievance became.

Of course, Captain Bromley could not introduce Mrs. Norman to us against her wish, nor us to her without an invitation from her. Nor could he bring about an introduction on either side if he thought that Mrs. Norman was not the kind of person I should like to know. And I had not shown any predisposition to like her (but, indeed, had been jealous of her influence from the very beginning of my liking for Captain Bromley), though I thought she must be an extraordinarily nice person for him to be so very fond of her. To be sure, she was his foster-sister; but there must be something more than that artificial relationship to account for his extreme partiality, since Miss Austen, who was an authority and had undisputed knowledge of human character, had written that sisters are amongst the most troublesome incumbrances with which a young gentleman can be afflicted.

Very likely Mrs. Norman was as little anxious to know me as I to know her, for she was probably one of those worldly persons who consider only their own interests, and wishing to monopolize Captain Bromley's attention, she preferred only to invite people like the old clergyman Captain Bromley had mentioned, for whom he could have but a feeble interest, rather than friends—like the professor and Miss Trevor—for whom he had a solid affection.

It was no affair of mine whether he indulged Mrs. Norman's caprices or not. And thus, having in an ill-natured and ungenerous spirit exonerated him from the only fault that could be charged to him, I proceeded with the same inconsistency to release him from an engagement he had never made. It was thus my thoughts ran on.

I said to myself that he was perfectly free to do as he liked. He was under no obligation to us; on the contrary, we were indebted to him for many hours of agreeable conversation. He had never overstepped the limits of friend-

ship; the notion that he contemplated making me his wife, or that he had any feeling towards me beyond those of ordinary friendship, was absurd. It was clear he could not care a bit for me, or he would not care so much for Mrs. Norman. And that being so, it behoved me to let him see that I had no feeling of any kind for him, except that of perfect friendship.

But the possibility that I might have betrayed another kind of feeling, that he might have been led to think by some stupid act of mine that I was infatuated with him, and that I hoped to become his wife—that, in short, I cared for him more than he cared for me—so stung my pride that I would, had it been possible, have recalled the past and substituted for my unrestrained enjoyment of his society, which had been very pleasant, a cold reserve, which must have been uncomfortable for us both.

It had been arranged that we should go for a drive that evening, but when the chaise was brought to the door I was still walking in the garden in ill-humour, though I saw through the scarlet-runners that Miss Trevor was dressed in her silk pelisse, and with her French curls brought well out in front of her bonnet; and then the professor came out in his black coat and green kid gloves, and finding me, asked if I was ready to join them. But I begged him to leave me at home, that I might get over my ill-temper without spoiling his pleasure.

‘As you will, my child,’ he said gently. And so they went off, looking both very unhappy; and I knew that I was childish and wrong, and that I ought to have gone with them and shaken off my morbid feelings for their sakes and my own credit. And I was heartily sorry before the chaise was out of sight. I felt most unhappy, and stood for a long while on the lawn under the mulberry-tree, my arm resting against the trunk and my cheek against my arm, and my heart aching for a good cry.

Under the impression that some time before nightfall I should see Captain Bromley, I had put on the dress he liked—the dress in which he said I reminded him of Sir Joshua Reynolds’ portrait of Mrs. Siddons. It was a blue-and-white striped silk, fitting my arms tightly, with puffs and an open neck, and I wore a white cambric handkerchief with it crossed on my bosom.

I thought to myself that it was no matter now whether he liked it or not, and that I would go up and change it for anything else, and never put it on again.

But just at that moment I heard the sound of wheels, and knew they were those of the chaise with the hood, in which Captain Bromley came over.

I started up from my despondent position, my heart beating quickly, and my face growing hot, and for a moment the old feeling returning to me. I was under the impulse to run out to the gate; indeed, I had advanced a couple of steps before I recollected the attitude it was necessary for me to assume now. Then, checking myself with the reflection that he had merely come out for an hour's distraction, I resolved to teach him that his amusement was not to be had at my expense.

As the chaise stopped at the front of the house, I ran quickly down the garden to the seat where Eliza sat shelling some late peas, and told the girl that someone had come to the house, and that if it was a visitor she might say where I was to be found; and, taking the basin out of her hand, I added that I would finish her work and she need not return. And as she went away I seated myself on the bench, taking the basin and some peas in my lap.

My fingers were idle, and I listened in breathless silence until I heard his well-known firm footsteps coming down the path; then I set to work with a will, and pretended to be humming a tune.

Ah! what a grievous disappointment it would have been had he gone away without coming down the garden to see me; and what a flutter of excitement, irritation, and, let me add, fondness was in my heart!

For I admit now, what nothing on earth would have made me acknowledge then, that, for all my contradiction and jealousy, I loved Valentine. And—little fool that I was—I thought then that I could almost hate him.

I would not turn my head until he was quite close to me, and greeted me with a good evening. Then, half rising, with the peas in my lap, and extending my hand with pretended difficulty, I said carelessly:

‘Ah, it is you. I thought it might be.’

‘Is that why you didn’t turn your head to see who was coming down the path?’ he asked quietly.

'I am so occupied this evening,' said I.

'I see you are,' he said; 'unusually occupied.'

'The professor and Miss Trevor have gone out in the chaise. They have not been gone long; I dare say you could overtake them with your horse.'

'Would you like me to try?' he asked, in a tone which left me in doubt whether he was serious or not, for I would not raise my eyes to look at him.

'That is as you please,' I returned, not without a fear lest he should act upon my suggestion.

'Then I shall please to stay where I am,' said he; 'and if it will lighten your labours, I shall be pleased to shell peas with you.'

He spoke now with that mock gravity which he assumed when I was capricious, and removing the basket of peas from the stool on which it stood, seated himself before me, put the basket between his knees, and broke the shells over the basin in my lap.

There was silence for some minutes, only broken by the pop of the peas-cods, and I began to feel that the advantage was not all on my side.

'Mrs. Norman is quite well, I hope?' said I, in a formal tone, when it was necessary that one of us should speak.

'Yes,' he replied, 'or I should not have left her.'

The popping of the pea-shells again became painfully noticeable. I was annoyed. If he had only shown surprise or anger, it would have given me an opportunity for being sarcastic and cool. But he seemed to be in exasperating good-humour. I felt that he was looking at my hands and my face—admiring them, perhaps, or secretly laughing at me.

'The professor is quite well?' he said, after awhile.

'Yes—or probably he would have stayed at home,' I replied, remembering his retort.

'Then I am doubly glad he is in good health,' said he gallantly.

'You do me honour to imply that you came expressly to see me,' said I, glad of the opportunity to be ironical, and hoping it would lead to further hostilities.

'I did come with that wish,' said he; 'not that I should like to leave, though, without saying farewell to our dear old professor.'

'Farewell!' I echoed, all envy, malice, and uncharitableness flying out of my heart, and better feelings returning in a flood at the sound of that touching word. 'Farewell!' I repeated, looking at him, and not trying to disguise the regret and alarm I felt.

'I am going away,' said he, looking at his watch, 'in half an hour.'

Half an hour—and he would be gone. And I had wasted the time in stupid silence and ill-natured banter! And I might no more see him who had filled a few hours with a greater happiness than had been spread over all the years of my happy life!

He looked into my eyes, and, thinking that he must read the feeling that agitated my heart, I bent my head and went on shelling peas.

He took the basket from his knees and set it aside; then, leaning forward with his elbows on his knees, he watched my fingers, that I tried in vain to prevent trembling, in silence for a moment.

'I want you to do something for me,' he said gravely.

'I will do anything in my power,' I replied.

'I am sure of that,' he said, speaking very low and earnestly. He waited a moment, and then continued: 'It is a service that only you can render, and which must be a secret one to succeed. It relates to Edith. I found her ill, as you know. Her illness was due entirely, I believe, to a morbid dread of her husband.'

'Dr. Norman?'

'Dr. Norman. Her dread, I am convinced, was groundless. He is simply a scientific man, engrossed in studies, and with very little kind feeling. Living in perfect isolation with him, she fell into a wretched condition of health and feeling. Since I have been at the Moat, and she has had the society of the parson from Orwell, she has recovered her former cheerfulness and courage, to a great extent. Certainly she is not the same woman I found her when I first came, and now that she is restored the parson and I think it will be well to make her independent of me, at least, for, much as I love the poor girl, I can't live there for ever. Norman, fearing to be disturbed in his precious studies, forbade her to make visits or receive them, but he made an exception in favour of the parson, and before

leaving I induced him to extend the exception to you ; and I promised Edith that you would go and see her from time to time. Will you go ?

‘ Oh, with all my heart ! ’ I cried, wiping the tears from my eyes with impatience, for they had not come in sympathy for poor Mrs. Norman, but in shame for my injustice to the generous man whose motives I ought to have known. ‘ With all my heart, ’ I repeated.

‘ Thank you, Doris, ’ he said, and he took up my hand, which lay upon the pea-shells, and pressed it. The time came for him to drop my hand, but he still held it, and leaning forward with one elbow on his knee, he looked into my face with great fervour, and much more kindness than I deserved.

I made a little effort to take it away, but his strong hand was not for mine to cope with, so I gave up the attempt and dropped my eyes, trying to keep the blushes out of my face.

‘ And you are going away to-night ? ’ I asked, to break the silence.

‘ Yes ; my mother’s ill-health furnished me with an excuse to leave the Moat. I must go to her. ’

‘ But you will come back some day, ’ I said, thinking how dull it would be when he was gone.

‘ That depends upon you, ’ said he, still speaking gravely, yet with a little pleasantry in his face.

‘ Upon me ? ’ said I.

‘ Yes ; if you want me to come back, I will come ; but if you were too busy shelling peas to care whether I came or not, it would be wiser to stay away for good. ’

‘ Oh, I did not mean it, ’ I cried, obeying the impulse of my heart, without thinking of what I said ; and springing to my feet, I dashed the basin and peas to the right and left. ‘ I hate shelling peas ; and do you think—— ’ And there I stopped.

‘ No, ’ said he, ‘ I do not think ill of you ; I don’t think you could put it in my power to think ill of you. I believe that the more I know of you, the more I shall find in your nature to admire and love ; and it is for that reason, Doris, that I dare ask you to be my wife. ’

When he said this my heart bounded with joy and pride—with joy in being loved by him, with pride in being found

worthy of his love, despite my faults. He had wooed me as I wished to be wooed, in no abject fashion, but with a manly recognition of qualities in me and himself which would ensure the lasting happiness of our union. It may have been because I loved him that I found his method of making love so admirable; but in truth I have always held in great contempt those heroes of romance who woo upon their knees with whining supplication for a tender consideration of their love-lorn condition, and with promises and vows impossible to keep; and equally I have despised those heroines who in their turn could vow to honour and obey such namby-pamby and insincere creatures. I cannot imagine any real woman of feeling and sense loving a man who places himself in the position of a slave, for the only man to be respected and adored must be our equal, if he is not our master.

He had conquered me, and now that he asked me to be his wife, there was the deepest tenderness in his voice, but no weak trembling. It was I who trembled and needed support; and when he said, 'I love you dearly, Doris,' I was constrained to bend forward, and he caught me in his arms. He held me against his breast, and kissed my forehead, until I raised my face to look into his, and then our lips met, and my heart overflowed with joy.

'I will be your wife, dear; and I will do all that I can to make you love me always,' I said.

'With that wish in both our hearts, we may look forward to a happy life together, love,' he replied.

Then we sat side by side on the seat where we had listened for the nightingale on the first day of our meeting, and we said nothing for some time, my happiness, at least, being unspeakable. And as if to impress upon my mind for ever the unparalleled happiness of those moments, my senses noted all the surroundings.

They were cutting the second crop of hay in the meadow, and the mowers were taking advantage of the cool evening, and now and then there came the pleasant sound as they whetted their scythes. There was a pure, sweet odour of new hay. The moon was already throwing a mottled shadow from the foliage of the apple-tree, though the tender flush of sunset still lingered over the hills, and all was quite still; not a leaf stirred. Overhead there were midgets, and

from time to time their droning hum was cut by the sharp, shrill cries of the swifts as they skimmed through the twilight.

CHAPTER IX.

CONTINUED FROM THE NARRATIVE OF DOROTHEA HOWARD.

It was some time before I thought of Mrs. Bromley, only when my thoughts began to wander from the present to the future.

‘Oh, your mamma, dear!’ I cried, jumping up.

‘You don’t think I intend to go before I have had it out with your guardian, do you?’ he asked playfully. ‘Why, I should never get a wink of sleep in the train with that terrible uncertainty in my mind as to his consent to our marriage. I have only your acquiescence at present.’

I knew that was enough for him, and that the opposition of the whole world would make no difference in our relations, now that he had won my consent. The interview with my guardian was but an excuse to stay near me.

‘Aren’t you going to-night?’ I asked, happy to think our parting might be postponed.

‘My mother is never visible before mid-day, and I shall be in town by that time if I catch the first train,’ he replied; ‘so that if you don’t object——’

I told him he was an old goose.

‘In that case,’ said he, ‘I may as well discharge Peters with the gig.’

We went up the garden slowly, I clinging to his arm, which I felt now belonged to me; and when we reached the house he left me on the lawn and walked round to the front gate. And I watched him as he went, feeling I had a right now to admire his tall, fine figure, his erect bearing, and handsome profile; and when he was out of sight, I covered my burning face with my hands, and couldn’t resist giving a little cry of joy to think of the full happiness of my lot.

But I could not bear to stand there alone, so I ran to the side of the house and peeped through the shrubbery.

Eliza was going in by the front door, looking rather abashed, with her finger in her mouth. She and the young

man from the Moat were on very amiable terms, and I think Valentine had come upon them unseen. This young man was standing by the horse's head.

'Hand out the things, Peters,' said Valentine.

'Which things, sir?' said Peters.

'All. I am not going to Barstow. You can return to the Moat. Put the traps inside.'

'There's another train a little before twelve, sir; shall I wait and take you on by that?'

'No.'

'To-morrow morning, sir?'

'No.'

Valentine put something in his hand, and Peters said, 'Thank you very kindly, sir;' and then, having put the luggage in the house, he got into the gig, touched his hat, and drove away.

I met Valentine as he came from the gate, and he proposed that we should go along the road to meet my guardian and Miss Trevor.

'The air is not too cool for you?' he asked.

'Oh no, no!' I replied. 'I will put something over my head if you think I ought to.'

'Yes, I think you should,' he said with becoming gravity, for this was the first command he had ever given me. I hastened in to obey him who had taken my whole life into his keeping.

I put a square of black lace over my head, and I was glad to find that it pleased him, and made me look handsome in his thinking. We did not talk seriously for some time; but he said some little things about me, and about his love for me, which dilated my heart, and seemed to lift me off the earth into a fairy region. And just as fairy stories seem childish to all but childish ears, the talk of lovers must lose its charm to those who are not in love; so I will not attempt to write down what passed between us then. But after a time we came down to matters of fact.

'And now, darling,' said Valentine, 'we will look practically at our position, and settle about the future.'

I assented readily, and he continued:

'To-morrow I shall see my mother, and tell her what has happened.'

'Do you think she will be pleased?' I asked, with a little trepidation.

'She will not be my mother if she disapproves anything that I do,' he replied. 'But it's a good thing that you are beautiful and well-born, or she would never have forgiven you for having bewitched her son. I suppose we shall start the next day for Scarborough, and there I think the professor must bring you to be introduced. After that there will be nothing to do until we are married, so that had better be pretty early. Don't you think so? When shall you be ready?'

I looked down, and was glad that my black lace and the twilight prevented him seeing my face. We were once again in fairyland, and nothing about me seemed material—except his arm.

'I don't think we need have a very long engagement, do you?' he asked.

I shook my head.

'Then when my mother feels strong enough to be left we will be married—that is, if the dressmaker has finished her part of the business. Will that suit you?'

I lifted my head, and offered him my cheek for reply.

'That settles the question of the wedding,' said he, when we were again walking along. 'Now what comes next?'

I shook my head, not knowing what was to come next.

'We must settle about our future home and manner of living,' said he.

'You know, dear,' said I, 'that I have no money now, nothing at all;' and for the first time I regretted the loss, thinking that a quarter of a million of money might have been useful to him.

'So much the better,' said he emphatically; 'if you had a large fortune, one would feel compelled to go into society at once, and I hardly think you are prepared for that?'

'Society, dear?' said I questioningly.

'The society of London—people of wealth, position, intelligence, fashion, and that sort of thing, you know.'

'I don't think you like society,' said I, judging his feelings by the slightly contemptuous tone in which he spoke.

'I don't think I do greatly—for long.'

'Then I am glad I am not prepared for it,' said I.

'Ah, but you will have to prepare for it. You will have to go through a severe course of training.'

I listened, and was somewhat frightened, not thinking then that he was speaking in a vein of pleasantry.

'It may be very pleasant to be a caterpillar; but if it is in the course of nature that the creature should develop into a butterfly, it would be simply absurd for that caterpillar to back out of the chrysalis stage, or in other words, dearest, if you have the possibility of becoming a princess it is not right to keep you in the condition of a peasant. That would be to cramp and compress faculties which should be expanded, and to limit your capabilities within unworthy confines. Admirably as your dear old guardian's system may have applied to your childhood, it is too narrow and exclusive for your career as a woman and a wife. One of these days I shall be rich—a long time hence, I hope, for my fortune will come only with the death of my mother—still, sooner or later I shall be rich, and then—then we must live in a bigger house than we want, and have more servants than we need, and go out in a carriage when we would rather by half walk, and spend money on things we don't want, and visit people we don't care for, and receive visits from those who hate us, and go to balls when we would rather be at home, and give dinner-parties when the doctor tells us we ought to eat nothing but mutton-chops.'

'But does that kind of life consist in doing nothing but what is repugnant to our tastes?' I asked, frightened by the prospect he laid out.

'No, dear,' he said, in a more serious tone; 'there is a good as well as a bad side to that kind of life, as there is to all others; and I hope we shall find the good exceed the bad a thousand-fold.'

'And how am I to prepare?'

'Oh, that is much too far away, I hope, for present consideration. What we have now to think of is, what we shall do immediately after our marriage. With the small fortune I have just now, we could not live pleasantly or well in London.'

I told him I should be quite content to live in the country with him.

'And I with you, darling,' he replied; 'but that does not quite agree with the progressive theory I have in my mind. It seems to me that nineteen years in the country is about long enough for a woman at one spell, and that she ought to see something more of the world than hills and valleys, and something more of mankind than the honest shop-

keepers of Litley and Barstow, and the simple but stupid shepherds of these parts. Now, what do you think if we went about from place to place, seeing cities and people, and now and then making acquaintance with persons who would prepare us for our future life in London ?

I thought that would be delightful, and I said so.

'Trains and hotels are expensive and unpleasant,' said he ; 'but if we had a yacht, and you found the sea agreeable, and weren't afraid of shipwreck——'

I told him I should have no fear with him. Indeed, I never had been a coward.

And there our conversation ended, for just then I heard the chaise coming along, and was seized with a tremor of excitement at the surprise about to be given to my beloved guardian ; and I bade Valentine step with me under the cover of the hedge, that the surprise might be greater.

The professor and Miss Trevor told me afterwards that they had never enjoyed a ride less.

Seeing how silent he was, Miss Trevor attempted to get up a little conversation by observing that she felt sure, by the quantity of midges in the air, that it would be fine the next day ; whereupon the professor took unnecessary pains to convince her that she was talking nonsense about a thing that she did not understand, since midges cannot live without seeking food in the air, and that it was quite as likely to be fine as not, whether there were no midges to be seen or many ; and this was a symptom of irritability so uncommon on his part that the poor old gentlewoman would not have dared to make another proposition had the heavens been full of midges. And so they finished their drive in lugubrious silence, and I never saw two more unhappy and doleful looking creatures in my life than they were as they passed by us. They must have thought me beside myself when I darted out from the hedge and put my arms round poor old Coquelicot's neck and kissed him. Coquelicot seemed to understand what I wanted, and stopped at once.

And then, going to the side of the chaise, laughing at my guardian's wide-eyed astonishment, I held out my arms, and drawing down his head, I said softly in his ear :

'He loves me, and I am to be his wife.'

The professor knew whom I meant, for Valentine, with more self-control than I had, was saluting Miss Trevor.

‘Well, well, well!’ he exclaimed; and that was all he could say. And these words he repeated again and again as we walked on—I on one side of the chaise, and Valentine on the other—but with a variety of accent, so that I could tell what was the feeling in his dear old heart; for first they were expressive only of surprise, then they were full of joyful satisfaction, and then of a sadness mingled with resignation, but again of satisfaction.

When we got into the house he took me in his arms and embraced me, and pressed Valentine’s hand, telling us in broken phrases that he was glad. Then he went down into the wine-cellar, and I heard him blowing his nose as he went, and returned with two dirty bottles from a store of wine he had laid down upon coming to Faulcondale. He drew the cork with great care, and when the glasses were filled he said to Valentine :

‘Now we will drink to your bride’s health.’

And the wine soon chased away the feeling of sadness which touched my heart as well as my guardian’s at the thought of the parting which must come.

When it grew late I bade Valentine good-night, and he went into the study of my guardian; but I felt sure I should see him again, so I slipped out into the garden, and by the light of the moon gathered a bunch of roses, and took them up into my room. Then I put out the light, and sat by the open window, very happy and thankful to heaven.

I could hear my guardian’s voice and sometimes Valentine’s in the study, the window there being open. My guardian was telling him the history of my father’s death, and the story of my fortune all over again. He thought fit to tell me of their conversation the next day; but I remember nothing but that when he told Valentine of his belief that in time he should be able to get back all my fortune from ‘X.,’ Valentine replied :

‘Whatever fortune you may have to give will be for Doris alone; for me she is enough.’

But at length the long talk ended, and then, just as I expected, Valentine came out into the garden.

‘Valentine!’ I called softly.

He looked up, and keeping my bunch of roses behind me, I leant over the sill and smiled, looking down at him. And

then the strangest thing happened: he went to the very same rose-bush I had been to, and plucked some roses, which one could see quite plainly in the moonlight, and taking off his ring, he passed the stems through it, and threw them up to me. They fell close to my heart, and I thought that was a good omen. Then I threw down the buds I had gathered, and tied together with a lock of my hair, and he caught them and kissed them again and again.

We talked together in a low voice, so that Miss Trevor might not be disturbed, for a long while, I nestling my cheek against the cool flowers he had given me as a token of his love; and if our talk was not as poetical as that of Romeo and Juliet, I am sure it came from hearts no less devoted than theirs.

* * * * *

We rose early the next morning, and I took Valentine to the station at Barstow, where we parted, he promising to write from Scarborough, that we might know when to join him there.

I went home, and as soon as Coquelicot was rested, I drove over to Beauchamp Moat. I saw Peters; he said that Mrs. Norman was not at home, and he could not tell me where she was gone or when she would return.

I waited some time, and then returned home, vexed with my failure to perform the service Valentine had asked of me.

In the evening a messenger came from Barstow with a telegram from Valentine to me; and I learnt that Mrs. Bromley's condition was worse, and that it would be impossible for her to leave London at present. I returned a message of sympathy; and that night seemed very sad after the joy of the evening before.

The next morning I went once more to Beauchamp Moat, and once more I was told that Mrs. Norman was not at home. I left my card. Not to be defeated, I drove over again in the afternoon, but with no better success.

It struck me that Mrs. Norman, perhaps, had been called to London by the critical state of Mrs. Bromley's health.

'Has Mrs. Norman left home?' I asked of Peters.

'I can't tell you, miss,' he replied; 'my orders are to say to every visitor that my mistress is not at home.'

I returned home and wrote a letter to Mrs. Norman, saying that I wished to see her, and asking when I should

find her at home. This letter I sent by a boy from the farm, telling him to wait for an answer. He came back empty-handed.

'A young chap took the letter,' said he, 'kept me waiting outside five minutes, and then come and told me there wasn't any answer.'

What was I to do? A letter from my dear Valentine told me that his mother was gravely ill, and unable to rise from her bed. He said nothing respecting Mrs. Norman. Loath to add to his trouble, I resolved to make another endeavour to see Mrs. Norman.

As my chaise stopped before the gate, Peters came out, shaking his head before I spoke, and with an impudent smile, which seemed to reflect the contempt my perseverance may have provoked in his mistress.

'Not at home,' he said, without troubling himself to approach the gate.

'Have you no message for me?' I asked.

'None,' he answered.

'Have you told Mrs. Norman that I have called frequently?'

'Yes.'

This proved that Mrs. Norman had not left the Moat.

'Why did she refuse to see me?' I asked myself.

CHAPTER X.

FROM THE NARRATIVE OF THE REV. DR. BULLEN.

I saw Mrs. Norman two days after the departure of Captain Bromley, and was vastly pleased to find her in reasonable spirits and hopeful, which was contrary to my expectations, for I had received that morning a letter from Captain Bromley telling me of his mother's illness, and I thought that this news would have caused Mrs. Norman anxiety. But I soon found that she had not heard from her foster-brother, and thinking he had good reasons for keeping the news from her, I held my tongue on the matter.

She was busy with her needle, and showed me the work she had set herself to do, and which, she said, would occupy her well through the autumn, especially as she had resolved

to devote her mornings to learning Italian; and as this indicated a determination to make the best of her situation, I began to think that matters were not so bad as I had thought they were, especially as her dress and personal appearance betokened a good deal of care and attention. It was only when the interest excited by my arrival wore off, and she became absorbed in her own reflections, that an expression of trouble and anxiety came upon her face.

To give a fresh turn to the conversation, I asked if Miss Howard had paid her a visit, Captain Bromley having informed me in his letter that she intended to do so.

'Yes, she has called,' replied Mrs. Norman, with some agitation; 'but I would not see her. Miss Howard is young, and there is nothing in my company to amuse her. Besides, I don't think I should like her, and under those conditions it would be worse than useless to make an acquaintance.'

'I can't agree with you there,' said I; 'it is true that Miss Howard is young, but so are you; there can be but four years' difference between you; and young women can always find plenty to talk about, so far as my observation has gone. And as to the possibility of your not liking her, that would be the case in making acquaintance with anyone, and can only be proved by intercourse. It is not right for us to live without conversing with people of our own sex, and therefore I think you do wrong in rejecting Miss Howard's offer of friendship.'

'There is another reason,' she said, glancing at the door, and dropping her voice; 'my husband objects to the acquaintance.'

'There again I think you are in error, for Captain Bromley tells me he obtained Dr. Norman's consent to it.'

'That may be, but I am sure it was against his inclination; and in according with his wishes in this trifling affair I know I have pleased him, and that is my great desire.'

I could say nothing after that. It was my duty to promote a good understanding between husband and wife, and not to set them at loggerheads. Indeed, I could only applaud the self-sacrifice of the young wife, while my contempt grew stronger for the husband who could avail himself of her abnegation.

I fancied there must be more in this than appeared on the

surface, and it seemed to me not impossible that before long Mrs. Norman would shut her door against me to win the approval of her husband.

As if to disprove this suspicion, Dr. Norman presently entered the room, and having introduced himself in an easy, gentlemanly fashion, he set himself to be agreeable to me. His appearance and manner upset all my preconceived ideas, and made me feel, I admit, somewhat ashamed of the prejudice I had taken against him. He looked like a young gentleman fresh from a university—a student, but without the stern, strenuous expression of one who has encountered the hardships and difficulties of a student's career after leaving his college. Still less could I discern in his face any sign of that designing and crafty nature with which Captain Bromley and I had mentally endowed him.

He talked pleasantly upon a variety of subjects, and once or twice addressed his remarks to Mrs. Norman, which was altogether at variance with Captain Bromley's statement of his habitude—and when I left the house he walked a hundred yards beyond the gate with me.

'I am glad to see your wife looking well,' said I.

He shrugged his shoulders, and shaking his head gravely, said, 'It is one of the most difficult cases I have had to deal with.'

'Why, what do you think ails her?' I asked.

'Her disease has yet to be named,' he replied; 'it arises from the undue gratification of an abnormal craving for excitement; it may lead to anything, from hypochondria to absolute insanity. Her condition requires complete mental repose, and even that is attended with danger. We have to steer between a Scylla of melancholia and a Charybdis of frenzy, and a difficult undertaking it is. I hoped at one time to effect a cure by removing all predisposing causes to excitement—as the germs of other diseases are killed, and killed only by their absolute starvation, and I am not yet convinced that I did right in abandoning that treatment.'

I was partly astonished with this logical explanation, but after looking at it carefully this way and that, I was not perfectly convinced.

'Surely, sir,' said I, 'there can be found a happy mean—something between indulging this unhappy lady in dangerous excitement, and an absolute seclusion from human society?'

‘The difficulty is to define what is dangerous excitement. Half measures are always perilous. You see the result of her brother’s visit; at first it was undoubtedly good, but in the end——’

He stopped short, looking at me significantly, and then shrugged his shoulders; evidently he had anticipated the same result that had frightened me.

This was a delicate subject on which to talk to a young husband, but I ventured to suggest that something was due to an over-sudden transition from one state to another, and that better results might attend a gradual process.

‘We will hope so,’ said he, shaking my hand, and then we parted.

I could not tell what to make of this; but one thing was evident, either I had done him a great injustice, or he took me for a fool.

I suffered a week to elapse before going again to the Moat. There was a noticeable change in Mrs. Norman’s appearance. She was thinner and paler; a careworn, faded expression overcast her face; there was that irresolution in her movement which arises from fear. She spoke nervously and with constraint, starting at every sound. At first I attributed these symptoms to her dread of a storm, for the afternoon was particularly close and heavy, with faint rumbling of distant thunder. But she assured me she was not afraid of lightning; and I shortly discovered that she was actually ill, for the timepiece striking four, she went to a side-table where there stood a wineglass and a tinfoil covered phial, and said it was time for her dose.

‘You are taking physic?’ said I, in a tone of inquiry.

‘Yes,’ she answered with a trembling voice; ‘my nerves are out of order, and Norman has prescribed this, which he says is a sedative.’

She looked at the glass into which she had poured the drug, and, standing in the middle of the room, glanced towards the door at the upper end and then at the lower one. The fixity of her regard, her pallor, the trembling of the glass in her hand, terrified me. She stepped towards me, and dropping her voice almost to a whisper, said: ‘Do you understand medicine, Dr. Bullen?’

‘Not much, indeed,’ said I, with truth, for I have never to my knowledge taken above two doses of physic in my

life. But I took the glass from her hands and put it to my lips.

There was not even the flavour of peppermint with which chemists disguise the unpleasantness of drugs; it had no taste at all that I could discover.

While I was making this examination she kept her eyes fixed first on one door, then on the other, and her hand raised to take the glass.

‘That can do you no harm, my dear,’ said I, ‘and I hope it will do you much good.’

I spoke in accordance with my conviction, for the medicine seemed to me to be nothing but pure water.

Recollecting what Dr. Norman had said about his wife’s tendency to hypochondria, it occurred to me that possibly she entertained a fear that she was ill, and that he had given her this harmless stuff to reassure her. But if that were his intention, he showed the strangest forgetfulness of his purpose, as the incident I am about to relate will show.

About five o’clock it came on to rain pretty smartly, and, hoping it would give over in an hour, I said I would stay to take a cup of tea with Mrs. Norman if it were agreeable to her. When the tea was served Dr. Norman came from his study, and, finding me seated there with his wife, greeted me very cordially and said he was glad to see me. He took his wife’s hand and put his fingers on her pulse as he was talking, and shortly after I heard him ask her in a low tone if she had taken her medicine. We sat some time at the tea-table, and then, the rain coming down more steadily than ever, he said :

‘Ah, Dr. Bullen, you will be kept here a prisoner; it has settled down for a good soaking night.’

And then he asked his wife if Valentine’s room was in order. She replied in the affirmative, and I readily agreed to stay there the night, not wishing to forego the opportunity of making myself agreeable to Dr. Norman. When it grew dark the lamp was lit, and Dr. Norman asked if I should like to play a game of cards. To this also I agreed; and a small table being set, he brought out a pack of cards, and we sat down to play a game of *écarté*.

I had no wish to win his money, but the luck was with me, so that I won despite his better play, which I thought irritated him—as a run of ill-luck sometimes will irritate

the best of players. So after awhile we fell to conversing between the deals, and our talk turning upon the medical profession, I said :

‘By the way, sir, may I ask what branch of science it is you are studying?’

He was looking at the cards he slowly shuffled ; Mrs. Norman was seated by the larger table working, and just a little way apart from us. Leaning back in my chair as I asked this question, my eyes fell upon the glass over the chimney, which, being slightly inclined, reflected Mrs. Norman sitting under the strong light of the hanging lamp. She had ceased to work. I saw the embroidery tremble in her hands. Her white face was turned towards her husband, and her eyes were fixed upon him.

‘I am studying toxicology,’ replied Dr. Norman quietly, as he manipulated the cards.

The announcement produced an unpleasant impression upon my mind. It was a revelation to his wife, seemingly. I saw her start and her eyebrows contract as she caught the word.

‘And I believe,’ pursued the careless husband, still slowly shuffling the cards, and regarding them with half-closed eyes, as if mentally following some deep speculation—‘I believe I have found out the secret of the Aqua Tofana.’

‘And what on earth may that be?’ I asked.

‘Aqua Tofana!’ he exclaimed, looking up in surprise ; ‘I thought all the world knew about that. It was a deadly poison employed pretty extensively in Italy in the seventeenth century, and named after the woman, Tofania, who made and sold it, and a very good trade she did in it. She confessed to being party to the murder of six hundred persons. It seems to have been employed almost exclusively by women’—he pressed his glasses a little closer to his eyes with his thumb and forefinger, and looking up at me, he added, ‘by women who were tired of their husbands, and wanted to get rid of them.’

There seemed to be a meaning in the impressiveness with which he spoke, and in the look which accompanied his words, which I was at a loss to understand. He dropped his eyes again, and once more shuffled the cards with an air of abstraction. I glanced at the mirror. The embroidery had dropped from Mrs. Norman’s hands, but she still regarded her husband.

'The woman,' continued Dr. Norman, 'escaped suspicion for a long time—the action of her poison being extremely slow, and unattended by violent suffering. When she was discovered all Italy was in a ferment. Numbers of women fled for their lives, and many in high position were convicted, and probably strangled in prison. A proclamation of the Pope described the poison as aqua fortis distilled into arsenic: some chemists considered it a solution of crystallized arsenic; for my own part, I don't believe there was a grain of arsenic in the whole brew.'

He laid down the cards, and from his waistcoat-pocket drew a small flat glass phial, which he put into my hand. It was half full of liquid.

'That,' said he, 'is one of the very bottles used by Madame Tofania. It was given to me as a curiosity, and first directed my attention to the subject. The liquid it contains is perfectly colourless, as you see, and as like distilled water as may be. I believe it is identical with the celebrated poison that flask once held. Four drops of that would kill you; and I doubt if the closest post-mortem examination would reveal the true cause of death.'

'Of course,' said I, returning the phial with pretended indifference—'of course one must learn how to kill, that we may know how to cure, and the only way of learning how to make an antidote is to find out what a poison is composed of.'

Then I squared myself to the table, and we played again, and to my great comfort I lost all the money I had won from Dr. Norman.

But all the while my thoughts were running on that accursed *Aqua Tofana*, and yet I wished to divert my thoughts from it, for I could not but remember the drug which Mrs. Norman took with such hesitation, and the fears respecting it which she had betrayed; and in associating the facts, a suspicion seized my mind which it was shameful to harbour at the same time that I professed friendly feelings for Dr. Norman. I was heartily glad when the time came to go to bed, though never in my life was I less inclined to sleep, or more dissatisfied with my lodgings.

'Yet what,' thought I, 'is the transient discomfort I bear compared with the awful terrors which night after night this unhappy young wife must endure?'

My bed-chamber was hot and close. I put open the window and looked out.

The rain had given over; but despite the past heavy downpour, the air was still thick and heavy. Dense clouds covered the sky, so that for some time I looked out of my window without being able to determine in what part of the house I was situated; but at length, my eyes being accustomed to the obscurity, I made out the irregular outline of a roof before me, which I concluded must be the ivy-covered wing, and then knew that the black gulf into which I had been looking was the courtyard. Presently a flicker of light over the heavens revealed the whole quadrangle.

I heard the 'drip, drip, drip' of water falling at intervals from the gable, and then the sullen growl of thunder far away amidst the hills.

A door closed below, and a minute or so later a light shone through the window at the further end of the wing abutting upon the laboratory.

Some time after this the door closed again, and a second light appeared in the wing through an opened window near mine. A fit of coughing told me that Mrs. Norman was in the nearer room, and as no word was spoken I concluded that the doctor occupied the further one. Was it part of the treatment required by her malady that her isolation should extend to this degree?—that she should be left alone night and day to brood over her misfortunes and conceive terrors which even my healthier mind could not exclude?

'Heaven have mercy upon her!' I said, turning from the window.

I took off my shoes; but got no farther, for the trouble in my mind; and I sat down on the edge of my bed, casting about me for some means to rescue this young woman from a position the like of which had never before come into my calculations. For though in my parish there are frequently cases of distress and sore anxiety, yet have they all been susceptible of alleviation by patient care and help. But this was one in which I was powerless to aid. 'Whom God hath joined together shall no man put asunder,' saith the Scripture, and common-sense told me I could not do that if I wished.

And how could I help the wife? Not by setting myself against her husband: the only comfort I could give was to

strengthen her faith in him, and make the best of things, and that I could only do by ingratiating myself with him; for if he thought that I was upsetting his plans, there would soon be an end to my visits, I feared. As to the possibility of modifying his treatment, that was altogether out of the question; for a man of science, with the conceit natural to young men, would scorn to accept the advice of a simple country parson in preference to his own doctrines, and might take offence at the mere suggestion of it.

I was still speculating in this manner, when a cry like that of a child in acute pain struck upon my ear.

I sprang to my feet and went to the window. There was no longer light in the room near mine, and I was not sure that there was light in the room beyond, but suddenly a glimmer of green light came through the blinds of the tall windows in the laboratory.

The cry, which sounded as if in a distant part of the house, must have come from there. Had Mrs. Norman, to satisfy some secret dread, penetrated into that mysterious chamber where her husband passed his days, and had her fears been realized? Did the sudden appearance of light there indicate the appearance of Dr. Norman, alarmed as I had been by that cry of anguish?

As these questions rushed into my mind, my ears were pierced again by that shrill distant scream.

Without hesitating a moment, I caught up my candlestick, made my way through the passage, down the stairs, and thence along a stone-paved passage, in the direction of the north wing. I came at length to an old door beneath which a wedge of light was visible. A large rusty ring hung in the place of a handle. I turned it, raising a latch within, but without opening the door.

'Who is there?' called Dr. Norman, from within.

'I—Bullen; let me in!' I answered.

There was a moment's silence, and then a catch was drawn, the door opened, and the light of my candle fell on Dr. Norman's face. It fell also on mine, which, I suppose, showed great perturbation; for he seemed amused as he looked at me, and burst into a laugh when I told him of the cry I had heard, and asked him to explain it.

'Have you never before heard the squeal of a rabbit?' he asked.

I must have looked incredulous, for, raising his arm, he showed a rabbit which he held by its ears, and then said :

‘Come in, I will convince you.’ He closed the door behind me, and throwing the dead rabbit on a bench, added : ‘I gave this fellow until noon to-morrow to live, but he has succumbed before his time.’

I looked about me.

There was a powerful argand reading-lamp with a shade upon the table that threw a strong circle of light, beyond which all was vague and indistinct.

The light of my candle was scarcely sufficient to reveal the black roof-timbers.

A microscope stood on the table in the light of the lamp, an open case of dissecting instruments, and a square case with the sign given to the planet Mars figured on the side.

‘You have a light—come up here,’ said Dr. Norman, and he led the way past the table towards that end of the apartment farthest from the door. My light was reflected by a glass retort and some bottles, but all else was lost. The blackness seemed to absorb the rays of light, giving me a strange impression of vastness and mysterious uncertainty. Presently my light fell upon the new woodwork of a row of hutches standing on a bench.

‘These are my subjects,’ said Dr. Norman, coming to a stand before the cages ; ‘now you shall see.’

He took the light out of my hand and opened a door. A rabbit within craned forward towards the light, which the doctor gradually drew nearer to his face ; suddenly the creature, seized with panic, scuttled round and round the hutch, and then, backing into a corner, gave a scream such as that I had heard.

I doubt not that my senses, quickened by nervous agitation, had intensified the cry, coming in the stillness of the night ; but even as I stood close to the animal I was struck by the wonderful resemblance of its scream to a human voice.

‘Is the poor wretch dying ?’ I asked, as I shut the door to end its terror.

‘Yes : but he has three weeks to live,’ replied he.

‘He is poisoned ?’ I asked.

‘Oh, they are all poisoned,’ answered the doctor carelessly, ‘and the curious thing about it is—*they know it !*’

I started.

'The unerring instinct of animals,' he continued, 'is a mystery that has yet to be explained. Take the light and open that door, the larger cage.'

I opened the door and looked in. A dog was lying on some straw, his muzzle resting on his two front paws. He blinked up at me, as the light fell upon him, but without moving.

I patted his head, saying a few words of kindness to the poor creature.

He crept forward in response and licked my hand, beating the straw with his tail. At that moment Dr. Norman approached, and brought his face within a foot of the candle; instantly the wretched animal, with a plaintive whine, turned over on his back, with his paws up, and quivering with dread.

'They all know me, you see,' said the doctor, in a cheerful tone of conviction. 'This brute has only had three doses, yet he knows he must die. It is positively wonderful.'

'It is horrible,' said I, turning away, sick with pity.

'Now there is another mongrel here who had his first dose yesterday,' said he; 'we will see——'

'No, no,' said I, lifting my hands; 'I have seen too much.'

The doctor laughed.

'Science would make but little progress,' said he, 'were we all as squeamish as you, my dear sir.'

'Well,' said I, 'I should be glad to know how science has gained by the infliction of so much suffering. What have you discovered besides the art of killing?'

'The art of curing,' he replied. 'Stay here a moment.'

Taking the light, he left me standing in the dark by the hutches, and went to a shelf, from which he took a bottle and a test-tube. With these in his hands he returned to me.

'Here it is,' said he, holding up the bottle.

I took the light, and he measured out a few degrees in the tube, speaking the while.

'This is a perfectly harmless mixture in itself, having no effect upon the digestive organs; but in combination with an infinitesimal quantity of the Aqua Tofana it produces a powerful emetic. So that not only does it detect the

presence of the poison, but it serves to get rid of the poison at the same time.'

Having measured the antidote and corked the bottle, he asked me to hold them. I took the bottle, but the light being in my other hand, I was at a loss how to hold the test-tube, until I bethought me of slipping the bottle in the breast-pocket of my coat, which left my hand at liberty for the tube.

The doctor now opened a cage, seized a rabbit by the ears, and proceeded to make an experiment, which in its immediate result proved that the animal had been poisoned.

'This is a fellow that was timed to die to-morrow,' said he, as he put the rabbit back in the cage, 'but you will find him alive next week.'

He wished to make another demonstration, but I assured him I had seen enough, and turned my back on the cages and their wretched inmates.

'I shall do an hour's work now I am here,' said he, taking up the dead rabbit from the bench when he got to the door. 'Can you find your way back?'

I said I could, and nodded good-night to him. It was absurd to hate the man simply because he had grown callous to suffering in his study of death; yet I felt that, had he offered me his hand, I could not have taken it in mine at that moment.

Looking down into the dark extremity of the room as I closed the door, I fancied I saw the light reflected in the eyes of those caged animals, and I pictured them watching the doctor through the bars of their prison, as he sat at the table in the light of the lamp dissecting his victim.

It was long before I fell asleep, and even when I lost consciousness of external things, the eyes of the suffering creatures seemed to look at me; and among them were Mrs. Norman's eyes with the selfsame look of terror and foreboding. And the words of Dr. Norman repeated themselves in my memory: 'They are all poisoned; and the strange part about it is—they *know it*.'

* * * * *

It was not until I got home the next day, and was in the act of changing my coat, that I discovered in my breast-pocket the bottle containing the antidote which Dr. Norman had put into my hands, and which I had forgotten to return.

I determined to use it as a pretext for going to the Moat the next day. But accidents occurred which prevented me carrying out my design before Saturday, which left an interval of three days between the visits.

I found Mrs. Norman alone. Her condition was alarming. She was wan and emaciated to a degree that I could not have believed possible of being produced in so short a space of time. There was still an attempt at coquetry in her dress, but this only made the terrible anxiety in her face more apparent—as living flowers about a statue intensify its lifelessness. There were deep purple lines under her eyes; she could not rest still for two moments; her speech was incoherent, her eyes wandered; feverish restlessness seemed already to indicate the insanity which her husband had predicted. She demonstrated hysterical joy on seeing me; and when this subsided, and reaction took place, she burst into tears, which she did not attempt to explain. After a little while she grew more composed, and I asked after Norman. She told me he had left the house half an hour before to go to London. I said what I could in his favour, and she listened to me with eager attention. When I came to an end, she said, clasping her hands:

‘Heaven forgive me if I have misjudged him!’

She hesitated a few moments, and then, as if under a desperate impulse, she asked me in a trembling voice, if I thought such a man could poison his wife.

‘It is very improbable,’ said I; ‘for though he may be wanting in tender feeling, he has intellect and sound sense, and for his own sake would not attempt a crime which must surely be traced home to him, and result in his ruin.’

‘I have said the same thing to myself,’ she said, ‘and yet I cannot overcome the terrible suspicion. Until the other night I could never discover what study he was engaged in—I knew nothing of the terrible poison he spoke of—yet I believed that he was slowly poisoning me. Look at this drug’—she took up the little tinfoil-covered phial and poured some in a glass, ‘is it not like the Aqua Tofana he showed us?’

‘Have you taken much of this?’ I asked.

‘I have taken none since you were here—none to my knowledge. But what of that?’—she drew near and caught

hold of my arm; 'he knows I have not taken it, though I lied and said I had; he knows by my pulse. And yesterday, as I stood in the corridor, I saw him in the kitchen pouring something from a bottle into the water I was to drink at dinner.'

'What sort of bottle was that?' I asked, after some reflection.

'A square one.'

'Did you notice any mark upon it?'

'Yes, I noticed a figure upon it like this.' Taking a pencil, she drew on a piece of paper this sign—

I remembered at once the bottle I had seen standing on the table beside the dissecting instruments.

I thought for some minutes, and then, recollecting the bottle in my pocket, which I had brought with me, I said:

'If I can get into the laboratory, I will settle this question once for all.'

I left her and went to the laboratory; the door was unlocked. Upon the table stood the square bottle.

I got a couple of test-tubes, and one I half filled with the antidote; into the other I poured a small quantity of the liquid contained in the square bottle. He had told me that four drops of the *Aqua Tofana* would be enough to kill me: here was a good half-dozen of the liquid from the square bottle, and as clear and liquid as water.

I sat down in the chair, and looked at the two glasses for a moment with a strange confusion of thought, and then, with a little prayer to the Almighty for mercy, and the forgiveness of all my shortcomings, I picked up the doubtful potion and drained it off; and not giving it too long to take effect, I then drained off with greater gusto the antidote. I waited patiently for five minutes, and then, feeling no more effect than if the drugs had been small ale, I returned to the sitting-room with heartfelt gratitude, to give Mrs. Norman this proof of her husband's innocence.

CHAPTER XI.

FROM THE NARRATIVE OF THOMAS CRAIK.

THE cruel blows from which I have suffered in the course of twenty years' struggling with adversity—not forgetting that

which broke three of my ribs, and put an end to my career as a horse-rider—were all as nothing compared with that in store for me. At the very moment of congratulating myself on having won the prize I had risked so much to gain, I discovered that I had got nothing but a blank.

On examining the envelope I found that it was empty. It was a square envelope of thick paper, and had been cut along its length carefully, and the contents taken out.

What was the meaning of this? I asked myself, when I got over the confusion of thought into which this discovery had thrown me.

It was most unlikely that Captain Bromley would keep the envelope in one place and the enclosure in another, which was simply to expose himself doubly to the risk of discovery, and to no purpose. While the two were together there was no more risk in keeping both than in keeping one, and it would have been useless to destroy the envelope which would identify the enclosure. But if the enclosure were more portable and easy of concealment without the envelope, then why should the latter, which might have been destroyed by simply burning it with a match, be carelessly kept, when its discovery would betray the theft? This showed a want of cunning and caution altogether contrary to the nature of Captain Bromley.

From these considerations I could draw but one conclusion, that the envelope and letter were both in that pocket; that I had taken one and left the other. I had been hurried and nervous in those last moments in Captain Bromley's bedroom.

I remembered how excitement seemed to paralyze my fingers when they came upon the letter in the lining of the bag, and with what difficulty I had clasped the paper between my trembling second and third fingers. I had left the important part in the bag: my fortune had literally slipped through my fingers!

It was something, however, that Captain Bromley had not recognised me. When I met him in the morning, there was nothing in his manner to show that he even suspected me. Dr. Norman said not a word to me concerning the occurrence, though there was nothing surprising in that, as Captain Bromley would not be likely to talk about the matter, or set afoot an inquiry which would show him up as the greater

thief of the two. But it struck me that possibly he was unconscious of my attempt, and with this last hope I resolved to run one more risk.

Furnished with a piece of wire, I made my way up to his room while Captain Bromley was at breakfast and the girl was busy in the kitchen—the dining-room and kitchen, as I have shown, were on the south side of the gallery—and taking the Gladstone bag on my knees, picked the lock in a couple of minutes. There was the slit in the back of the pocket, but not a vestige of paper where I had found the letter, or elsewhere. I closed the bag, and went back to the laboratory completely disheartened, and cursing my clumsiness, by which I had ruined one of the finest chances ever young man had.

However, my despondency wore off in the course of the morning, and I regained my confidence, arguing that I was at any rate more advanced now than when I began, and that it needed only patience, perseverance, and a little more care to obtain the other part of the letter.

‘Only give me time,’ said I to myself. But that was exactly the thing Mr. Bromley would be not likely to give me. The knowledge that he was suspected would urge him on to marry Miss Howard.

That marriage must be opposed, and at once.

I set to work, and on a sheet of tissue-paper, cut exactly to the size of the envelope, I carefully traced the words written by Mr. Howard on the envelope. This paper I enclosed in a letter to Miss Howard, in which I told her nothing but the plain truth in warning her against accepting the offer of Captain Bromley. In the afternoon I got permission from Dr. Norman to go over to Lipley on the pretence that I wished to buy a new hat. I did not go near Lipley. I went to Faulcondale, where, watching my opportunity, I laid my letter in the road, just as my young friend Eliza was about to come out, and skipping round the corner of the garden hedge, I had the pleasure of seeing her pick it up, and take it round to the back of the house, where the family were taking tea. I just waited long enough to see through a convenient hole in the hedge that my letter had taken effect, and then off I went to the Moat, saying to myself that I had now certainly done Captain Bromley’s business. And there I underrated the skill of my adversary.

The moment I got home I was told to get the gig ready; then I was sent to fetch Captain Bromley's luggage and put it in the trap. This alarmed me; and my alarm increased when he got up in the gig, and I was told to drive to Barstow. What was the reason for his sudden departure I could not make out, unless, frightened by the loss of the envelope, he felt it necessary to put the enclosure in a safer place. But the consequences of this move on his part were grave enough to me. It upset entirely all the plans I had been making during the day for another attempt to get the precious paper before his departure; and in all probability it would put an end to my employment at the Moat, for Dr. Norman would no longer require a spy to watch his wife, and for that purpose—and for that purpose alone—I was convinced he had engaged me. 'And now,' thought I, 'in about a fortnight or so, I shall be without means of subsistence, and further than ever from my project. One thing I determined to do before we got to Barstow, and that was to throw suspicion upon Dr. Norman, and try if I couldn't induce Captain Bromley to take me as his servant. But this was a day full of disappointments.

'Stop at that house,' said Captain Bromley, as, passing through Faulcondale, we came in sight of Mr. Schlobach's.

I saw at once that he had resolved to make a bold stroke, and I thanked my lucky stars that I had been beforehand with him there. 'You won't stay there long,' said I to myself, as he jumped down and went into the garden by the front gate. Eliza met him, and took him round the house into the back garden. I gave him at the outside five minutes to get his dismissal; but ten minutes passed, and, he not returning, I began to get anxious.

Eliza came out with a grin all over her face, and after I had paid her a few attentions, I asked what was going on in the garden.

'There's only Captain Bromley and Miss Howard there,' she replied, 'and they're a-shelling peas together.'

'A-shelling peas!' I exclaimed. 'You don't tell me that a real gentleman like Captain Bromley is a-shelling peas!'

'Yes, he is,' she replied, 'like a good un.'

'Eliza, my beauty,' said I, fishing a sixpence out of my pocket, 'do you see this sixpenny piece?—well, it's a lucky one.'

'There ain't never a hole in it,' she said doubtfully.

'But there's going to be a hole in it,' said I, 'and you shall have it for a keepsake, if so be you're telling the truth about Captain Bromley and your young missus.'

'Well, go down by the side of the hedge and peep through at the bottom of the garden, and see for yourself,' said she.

'Hold the horse's head, then,' said I, 'and I'll go and have a look, just to oblige you.'

And so, leaving the simple girl with the bridle in her hand, I slipped down to the bottom of the garden on the outside of the hedge, and there, to my astonishment, I saw Captain Bromley holding Miss Howard in his arms, and no objection shown on her part.

I watched long enough to be sure that there was no mistake about it, and then I went back to the gig in a state of dejection impossible to describe.

When Eliza asked for her lucky sixpence I told her I intended to make a hole in it; and I kept my promise after a fashion, for I bought a pint of ale out of it on my way home, to cheer up my spirits.

But my misfortunes did not end there; for before long Captain Bromley came out and told me I could go back to the Moat, as he did not intend to go on to Barstow. So I had no chance of hinting that he had been robbed of the letter by my master, or of trying to get into his service. Everything was against me; even the ale I bought on my way home did not agree with me.

And now, when I came to weigh everything up, I found I was not so clever as I should have been, and that I might as well try something else as attempt any further to get the stolen letter. I had done my best to save Miss Howard; she wouldn't accept my warning, and I was willing she should abide by the consequences.

I fully expected to get a week's warning on Saturday, but the only remark Dr. Norman made when he paid me was, that I must try and make myself useful, as there was hardly enough work in the laboratory to keep me employed; he asked if I thought I was carpenter enough to put up a partition so as to divide the laboratory into two compartments. I had shown some skill in making a set of hutches for the animals he was experimenting on; and when, anxious to keep my place until I could find a better, I told him I

could do it if I only had the tools and materials, he told me to make out a list of what I wanted, and let him see it.

I set about this at once: measured the place, made the calculations as low as I could, knowing he was not the man to spend much even upon what was necessary, and gave him the list. He looked over it, struck out a few items, and sent me over with a cart to Lipley to get the things.

He said I could use one of the old lumber-rooms as a workshop, and here I stacked my boards and quartering, and having rigged up a bench, set to work planing and squaring the wood. That he might have no reason to complain, I knocked up a bin in one of the rooms, where I put all my shavings and chips, pointing out to him that they would be useful for lighting fires when the cold weather came.

But though this job occupied my thoughts a good deal, I couldn't help thinking of the chance I had lost; and it was such a pleasure to dwell on what might have been, that the subject got hold of me like a passion, and gradually from dwelling on what might have been, I came again to speculate on what might be. I kept my eyes open, and took notes of all that was passing.

First of all, having a bad shilling which was not good enough to pass, I bored a hole in it and took it over to Eliza as a present, and taking advantage of the girl's responsiveness, I gathered that Captain Bromley was going to marry Miss Howard, but that the wedding was put off because Mrs. Bromley had been taken ill. I also learnt from her that he had not been at Faulcondale since the day after he left Beauchamp Moat, but that he wrote repeatedly to Miss Howard.

The next thing I observed was that, although Captain Bromley was no longer in the house, Dr. Norman continued to be jealous of his wife. No letters came to the house or went out of it without passing through his hands; I believe he secured more than one that did not belong to him. I am sure that Mrs. Norman got none, and that none from her was given to the postman.

That she was jealous of Miss Howard was as clear as day. for over and over again that young lady called at the Moat, and every time I was instructed to tell her that Mrs.

Norman was not at home ; and I own it gave me some pleasure to notice her mortification at the constant denial.

But that which gave me greater satisfaction and inspired me with new hope was the astonishing change in Mrs. Norman. I never saw a woman alter so quickly in all my life. From being a bright, pretty-looking young lady she seemed suddenly to become old, plain, and dull.

I can bear witness that Dr. Norman never spoke an angry word to her ; but I must admit that he was as awful a man to live with as it is possible to imagine.

I have known him to come into the laboratory straight from his bedroom at eight o'clock in the morning, and stick there with his books and experiments until midnight, sending me for his meals, and never so much as saying ' How do you do ? ' to his wife. He never went out with her or stayed in her company except when he chose to eat in the dining-room, and then he always had a book on the table. So that for days together she never opened her lips to say a word, or heard a word spoken ; for besides the deaf and dumb girl there was no woman ever in the place ; the only man was a gray old parson, and he wasn't much of a companion for a young lady—being a parson.

I was not surprised she should feel lonely after the gay companionship of Captain Bromley, and I think I should have felt sympathy for her then, and tried to say a word or two upon the work I was doing for master, etc., only that I saw it was against my interest.

For it was plain by the look of her that this state of things couldn't go on for long, and that when the solitude became perfectly unbearable she would run away to Captain Bromley. And then, thought I, if this proud Miss Howard will marry him, she's not the sort of young woman the simple Eliza has led me to think her.

How it was that Dr. Norman did not see what must happen I couldn't make out.

Either he was too absorbed in his studies to notice the signs I saw by watching so closely, or he thought that she was too high-born to do such a thing. He didn't read newspapers, or he might have been undeceived in that respect.

Before going any farther, I must tell of a remarkable discovery I made ten days after Captain Bromley's departure. On that morning I sat down in the doctor's chair—

it being before his hour of rising—to cipher up how I might cut my nine-feet planks to cover the space for my partition, and, taking up a pen that lay in the inkstand, I wrote down a few figures.

The pen itself first caught my eye, because I had never seen it on the table before; and next my figures attracted my attention—they were so particularly fine. The nib was one of the hardest I ever wrote with; it was impossible to make a heavy downstroke. Looking at the words I had written in trying the pen, I asked myself where I had seen writing so fine in its up and down strokes as that. Suddenly it occurred to me that the letter I had received at the Camberwell post-office recommending me to offer my services to Dr. Norman was peculiar in this way. I got the letter out of the inside pocket I had sewn to my waistcoat, put it before me, and copied the top line as clearly as I could with the hard pen. The resemblance was close enough to be striking.

I opened the book, in which the doctor had made marginal notes, and compared the writing with my letter; but there I was disappointed—though not disheartened. For though the writing in the book was as unlike the letter as could be, yet the regular, copperplate hand in the letter was such as any boy who had learned to write from a copybook could do. Before attempting to go on with this interesting inquiry, I looked at the kitchen clock. It was six; the doctor never came down before seven. I returned to the laboratory, got my favourite skewer, and picked the lock of the table-drawer. I went carefully through all the papers without finding any like that on which the letter was written; all the doctor's writing-paper was thick and good quality. I shut up the drawer and relocked it, and then, ransacking my memory, it occurred to me that I had seen some cheap, thin paper in Mrs. Norman's work-box one morning when casting an eye over her locked-up treasures. It was too late to do anything then. But the next morning I got up a little earlier than usual, took my skewer into the drawing-room, opened the work-box, got a sheet of the white paper, held it up to the light, and had the satisfaction of seeing the same water-mark in it that figured on the letter from my unknown counsellor.

Now, here was the solution of a riddle that had for some time

perplexed me. Who wrote that letter advising me to take service at the Moat as a means of discovering the person who stole the letter? I had at first attributed it to Mr. Schlobach, but as I learnt more of his character, I came to see that he was the last person in the world to suspect anybody.

Sifting out the dates, I saw how matters stood. There was time between the theft and the posting of the letter to me for Dr. Norman to have heard of the robbery, which was noised all over the country. Jealous of Captain Bromley from the first, and anxious to find that he had taken the packet, he took advantage of information which Captain Bromley himself would detail in the way of gossip to avert suspicion from himself, and wrote to me with the hope of my tracing the theft home to him, and so putting an end to a friendship he could not well otherwise control. And the more I weighed up this theory the more solid I found it, until at last I looked upon it as an assured fact.

Now to return to Dr. Norman, in whom I took fresh interest from the nature of this discovery.

He had been studying poisons. There were many bottles he warned me against, and you may be sure I didn't pry into them. A good deal of distilling and filtering went on with powders and drugs of all kinds. These I didn't object to, being able to keep a respectful distance; but he proceeded to experiment with a new kind of poison which terrified me fairly.

One afternoon he went to London; the next evening I fetched him from Barstow Station in the gig. He had with him a curious box, which he put under the seat of the trap with the greatest care.

The box was about three feet long by eighteen inches, and ten deep. It looked as if it might be of Oriental make, for the top was covered with an intricate and fine fretwork of two kinds of wood. The lid, which was hinged, fastened in front by a couple of eyes and pegs, but it was made more secure by a small nickel padlock.

It was late when we reached the Moat, and I had no opportunity to examine it that night; but I rose early the next morning to satisfy my curiosity. From the care with which the doctor handled it I thought it might contain bottles; and having no great taste for bottles, I should have left the case alone, and all would have gone pleasantly.

But the padlock betrayed me ; for I never could see a locked box without a burning desire to pick it and know what it contained. So to work I set with my bent skewer, got the little padlock off, and then drew the pegs.

I lifted the lid carefully, for fear of breaking anything, and found a sheet of baize folded to fit the box. Kneeling on the floor, and with my left hand resting on one side of the box, I raised the baize with the right hand carefully. As I was doing this I felt something cold pass over my left hand. I looked, and then sprang back with horror. A long gray snake had issued from the box and lay upon the floor, its head raised towards me.

There is nothing in the world I dread so much as these loathsome reptiles. I never pass through a wood without fear of treading on one, notwithstanding the fact that vipers are rare in England, and almost unknown in this northern county. The sight of the most harmless thrills me with horror.

I concluded that Dr. Norman had procured it in order to experiment with its venom. As I looked at the thing my hair bristled on my head ; it slid with quick, zig-zag movement across the ground, and disappeared under the skirting-board of the wainscot against the wall. What was I to do ? For the life of me I could not have tried to catch it, had it remained near the box ; to attempt to dislodge it from the opening under the wainscot, with the chance of its darting out upon me or running up the stick to my hand, was still less possible. No ; come what might, it should stay in its refuge for any effort of mine to get it back in the box.

I glanced at the box. A movement of the baize showed that there were other snakes there. In another moment the rest might escape—the ground might be covered in all directions with wriggling vipers. There was no limit to the terrors my imagination conjured up in that moment. Summoning up my courage, I stepped forward, closed the lid of the box, and thrust in the pegs. Then I turned about, fearing that the escaped snake might be worming itself towards me. I was sick with fear. There was no sign of the thing. I went to my room that opened upon the laboratory, and shutting the door, assured myself that there was no space between the sill and the foot of the door for the snake to pass. Then, growing calmer, I returned to

the hateful box, cursing my fatal curiosity, and fastened the lock.

Examining the skirting-board, without going too near, I found that from the sinking of the tiles or the shrinking of the wood, a space of an inch and a half existed along the whole length of the wall. I sat down, running my eye along the opening, and expecting every moment to see the hideous head come out, and I was still sitting there when Dr. Norman came in.

‘What’s the matter with you?’ he asked, seeing my condition at a glance, as I got up from the chair. I told him I didn’t feel well, which was the truth.

He looked at me steadily with his half-closed eyes, put his fingers on my pulse, and told me to put out my tongue.

He nodded his head, with the slightest possible smile creasing the muscles of his face, and bade me go and get my breakfast. He saw there was nothing the matter with me but fright. He had already cheated me, but there was no cheating him. I took my breakfast, and, having to feed the caged animals, went back to the laboratory.

The doctor had the box on the table, and was looking in it; the baize was turned back. I stood at the door.

‘Give me my small case off the little shelf,’ said he, without raising his eyes.

I took the case to the table, not without a glance at the skirting-board. There seemed to be a dozen snakes, small and large, in the bottom of the box, some knotted together in the middle, and others curled up in the corners. He put his hand amongst them and fished out one with as much coolness as a fishmonger might serve an eel; then he put in the baize with the other hand, arranged it carefully, and closed the box, while the snake in his hand was wreathing its tail round his arm, and dropping out its forked tongue every now and then. At his direction I opened the case, and gave him a pair of tongs. He held the snake by the throat, and pressing his thumb somewhere against the back of its head, forced open its jaws. He looked at it closely, and then he carefully nipped one of its fangs with the tongs, and with a little twist of the wrist drew it out.

But I have said enough to show the cool-headed, keen man of science he was, and I shall be glad to quit this part of the affair, as I was then glad to escape from the labora-

FROM THE NARRATIVE OF THOMAS CRAIK

tory, and get to my work in the lumber-room, where I was occupied all day in planing my boards for the partition. But even there I did not feel safe, and in the afternoon I was nearly scared out of my wits in crossing the dark room adjoining, by treading on a piece of old rope, and had horrid dreams that night.

The next day was Sunday ; I went over to Faulcondale—only too happy to turn my back upon the laboratory—to see Eliza, whom I took out on principle every Sunday afternoon, weather permitting. We sat on a stile, and when I had indulged her in a little love-making, I asked her if her wish to get another half-crown from Captain Bromley had come true.

‘No,’ said she ; ‘but I think it will to-morrow, for I heard Miss Howard tell master this morning he was coming.’

The silly young woman grew very red as she told me this, and said she did not mean to overhear, but that she could not help it. I told her she did wrong not to listen when she had the opportunity, as our employers frequently forget to tell us of duties they expect us to perform, and our only means of knowing what is required of us is to acquaint ourselves of everything that takes place in the house, whether it concerns us or not. And she was of such a docile and tractable disposition that I sent her home with the fixed determination to listen in future at every door that had a key-hole, and be a better girl henceforth. I will say this on my own behalf—I practised in accordance with my preaching.

The next morning the old parson from Orwell came to see Mrs. Norman, and as her symptoms seemed to be daily growing worse, I was, for more reasons than one, anxious to know what passed between them.

Dr. Norman was in the laboratory ; I was engaged in carpentering. The parson and Mrs. Norman sat for some time in the courtyard ; then they rose and strolled out by the gateway. The doctor had told me to look for some roots of fox-glove in my leisure, and there being no opportunity better than the present, my arms aching with the work of sawing, and my mind still in constant excitement concerning the lost snake, I put on my hat and slipped out of the house in pursuit of Mrs. Norman and her friend. I

saw them walking slowly along the road. Getting up into the pine wood that skirted the road, I made haste to overtake them ; but though I was soon on a level with them, I couldn't get near enough to hear their conversation, a pine wood being the worst place in the world for my business. The trees, though tolerably close together, were not thick enough to hide behind, and there was no undergrowth except a little low-growing huckle. So, for some time, I had to keep high up in the wood, where I could hear nothing but a low murmur of their voices. However, before long Mrs. Norman fell a-crying, and the old parson made her sit down on a fallen tree that lay alongside the road, and, as luck would have it, not far off there was a blackberry-bush. I slipped from tree to tree as quickly as I could, and got down to the bush without being heard, for the ground was covered thick with the brown pine needles, and made a safe carpet.

Mrs. Norman was sobbing pitifully, and between her sobs she cried, 'I cannot bear it—I cannot bear it—it is more than I can bear!'

The old parson talked some stuff about duty, and resignation, and such-like ; but he seemed to make no effect, which did not surprise me.

'I have tried to do right,' she went on ; 'I have tried hard to be a good wife. I don't want to be frivolous, as if I were still a girl, but I must have some sympathy—something to make me forget what I am.'

The parson made a few more unimportant remarks, and she continued :

'Ah, you do not know what I suffer—you cannot imagine it—the awful solitude, and then the terrible dread.'

She covered her face with her hands.

'My dear, I have shown you that those fears were groundless,' said the parson, 'and in unjustly suspecting your husband it is you who do him wrong ; and you are bound to overcome your suspicions, and in that way atone for a fault that may be excused, but which still remains a grievous fault on your side.'

'It may be so ; I may be mad on that point—heaven help me ! I sometimes think I am no longer sane ; but if,' she added, dropping her voice so that I could only just catch her words, 'if I found those fears were not groundless——'

‘Then I would not say another word,’ said the parson ; ‘nay, I would do all that lay in my power to separate you. Come, my child, let us walk on, and I will tell you what I will do, so that you may overcome an unjust hallucination or put an end to your sufferings in some other way.’

He had risen, and she, rising, took his arm for support, and they walked on ; and thus, to my regret, I heard no more.

Seeing which way the cat jumped, I set my wits to work to find an expedient for letting Mrs. Norman know that Captain Bromley was at Faulcondale, thinking perhaps that the temptation from him, which the parson referred to, would be too strong to resist in her present state of desperation ; for if I could only get her to go to Faulcondale, the state of feeling between her and Captain Bromley would be proved, and most certainly shake Miss Howard’s blind faith in him. And it was of the most pressing importance that I should prevent Captain Bromley making Miss Howard his wife while that letter was still in his possession.

It was not long before I hit upon a plan, and as soon as the parson had left the house, I took a little old book, vol. ii. of ‘Count Fathom,’ which I had found amongst the lumber in clearing up my room for a workshop, and going into the sitting-room, I said :

‘If you please, ma’am, I found this here under the garden-seat in the court.’

‘It must belong to your master,’ said she, after looking at the title. ‘Take it to him, Peters.’

‘If you please, ma’am, I don’t think it belongs to master, because I see Captain Bromley a-reading it when he was here.’

‘I will send it to him by post, in that case.’

‘I’ll take it over to him after tea, if you like, ma’am. That’ll be quicker.’

‘Take it to him !’ she said quickly. ‘Captain Bromley is in London.’

‘I beg your pardon, ma’am. The young woman I’m walking out with, Mr. Schlobach’s servant, told me yesterday as he is a-staying there.’

I saw an angry flash in her eyes, and then a look of pain,

and then she turned away hastily to her work-basket that I might not see her face.

It was quite a minute before she spoke ; then, in a faint voice, she said, without turning :

‘ Leave the book on the table. You need not take it.’

I felt sure she meant to go to Faulcondale, but I was disappointed. At ten o’clock I was hanging about in the courtyard hoping that something would come of my scheme, when I saw a light in her bedroom. There was a light in Martha’s bedroom also. Dr. Norman was in the laboratory ; it was his habit to go round and look to the doors before going to bed, and as I did not wish to be caught in the yard, I made my way sorrowfully out of the court, got down into the ditch, and, going round the outside of the house, entered my room by the window overlooking the moat, and from which I had contrived a means of getting in and out by a piece of old timber stuck against the wall. I had hardly got into bed when I heard Mrs. Norman shriek. There was just that one awful cry and all was still. Then I heard Dr. Norman’s chair move, and the great latch of the laboratory lifted. I leapt out of bed, slipped on my clothes, and, going into the empty laboratory, where the doctor’s lamp was throwing a light upon the open book he had left, I went to the blind in which was the hole that Dr. Norman had used to keep his eye upon his wife and Captain Bromley.

The lights were just as I had last seen them—one in Mrs. Norman’s room, and one in the deaf and dumb girl’s. I could see no movement of shadows ; I could hear no sound.

I stood there wondering what on earth the shriek meant and what might happen next, and these speculations made me forgetful of the danger of being discovered.

Suddenly someone spoke quite close to me. It was Dr. Norman.

‘ Peters,’ he said, ‘ do you know this ?’

And, turning in alarm, I found him holding, with its head but a few inches from my face, the long gray snake I had suffered to escape from the box.

* * * *

I learnt afterwards from Martha that as she was about to put out her light Mrs. Norman had burst into the room, with a face as white as her nightdress, and, seizing her by

the wrist, had dragged her along the gallery and into her bedroom. There, approaching the bed, she pointed to a snake lying in a long fold between the pillow and the bedclothes. Then she staggered to a chair and fainted.

CHAPTER XII.

FROM THE NARRATIVE OF DOROTHEA HOWARD.

VALENTINE wrote telling me that unless any unforeseen change in Mrs. Bromley's condition occurred to prevent it, he should be with us on Monday. I drove over to Barstow to meet him. I thought Coquelicot would never get to the station in time. Yet I arrived there quite half an hour too early, and that half-hour seemed the longest I had ever known. But the train came crawling in at last, and Valentine was the first to get out.

I was so happy in seeing him, or he so happy in seeing me—perhaps both—that I perceived no change in him for some time, except that he looked more handsome than ever. But when we came to talk of Mrs. Bromley, and we were grave, I saw how careworn and anxious his dear face was.

He told me that his mother could not move without help, being quite paralyzed in one side, and that she needed attention night and day; and I believe, though he said nothing about it, that he chiefly nursed her. And who could be so tender and solicitous as he?

'I wish you were in London, darling,' he said; 'it is unnatural to be so far apart, loving so much.'

And, indeed, I felt so too, with all my heart.

Now that we were talking upon serious matters, I told him how I had failed in my endeavours to see Mrs. Norman. This failure had given me great trouble, for I earnestly desired to be of service to the poor lady, not only on her own account, but because it was Valentine's wish. I know he was too generous to think that I had not tried my hardest to succeed, and his manner and his words proved that now. We talked about this matter for some time.

'I cannot make it out,' he said with a little impatience. 'If Norman were a villain one could understand the affair. But he is too indifferent to be actively cruel. He is a man

accustomed to study cause and effect, and look more deeply into things than such men as myself possibly can. He would do nothing without a purpose, and I cannot see what he has to gain by such cruelty as can alone explain this. She has much to suffer in being married to such a man as Norman, but that does not account for all that is strange in her conduct. She seemed delighted when I proposed that she should make you her friend, and got Norman to agree to it. Yet the very next day she changes her mind and is absolutely rude to you. I wrote to her suggesting that she should come to London and see my mother, and she refused in a roundabout way, making a very absurd excuse. If she were acting under coercion it would all be understandable. But Norman has nothing to gain by coercing her. He does not love her well enough to object to her leaving the house for a few days, nor can he feel jealous of her affections being devoted to friends for whom he has no liking.'

He seemed to regret the irritation which had led him to say this, for he said, some time after, in the kindest tone :

'One ought to forget her faults in consideration of her sorrows. There's no one in the world so much to be pitied as a flattered coquette when she wakes from her brief dream of happiness to the severe reality of a lonely life. Poor soul! she was the brightest, prettiest, most fascinating girl.'

'She had many admirers, I suppose?' said I, my evil feeling of jealousy quickened by this praise.

'Yes; and now there's not one who cares for her—not one—unless my impatience is overlooked.'

'You were amongst her admirers?'

'I stood at the head of them at one time. I thought I should die if I didn't make her my wife.'

'And why didn't you?' I asked quickly.

He smiled.

'There was more than one reason,' he said; and then, turning upon me with that tone of pleasantry he adopted when he perceived my weakness, he added: 'One very good reason is that while I was in Egypt she married Dr. Norman. But a still better reason, in your opinion, perhaps, is that I gave up the idea of marrying her or dying without her when I came to the age of discretion, and thought that a

young man of twenty-one should aspire to someone a little more mature than a young girl of twelve or thirteen.'

When I found he had only been trying me, I was ashamed of my jealousy. Nevertheless, I was not quite cured of it then; for at night, when I was alone, and going over the pleasant incidents of my dear love's visit, this unpleasant little trifle returned to my mind.

If Edith were twelve when he was twenty-one, he must have been twenty-eight when she was my age. Why had his love not returned for the young coquette, so bright, pretty, and fascinating? Had it returned? had he contemplated marrying her when he returned from Egypt? And had he only omitted this fact because he saw how jealous I was?

I am ashamed to say these questions rankled in my heart. It was not sufficient that he loved me well; I wanted a love such as he had never felt for anyone else.

He left us soon after ten the same evening to walk over to Barstow for the last train. He dared not wait until the morning, lest his mother might need him. It was too late for me to take him to the station, and he refused to let us send for the farm lad to drive the chaise. He preferred walking, he said.

'It is pleasanter when one wants to think about one's happiness,' he added.

Before going he put a lovely ring upon my finger; and when he saw that it fitted, he said:

'Ah, now I know what size the other is to be!'

I was still awake, though it was very late—nearly morning, indeed—when I heard a violent ring at the bell. My first thought was that Valentine had missed the train—for I had kept him until the very last moment possible—and returned. I leapt out of bed, opened the door, and listened. My guardian threw up the window. I heard him call:

'Who is there?'

Then I heard a voice from the garden call, in reply:

'Me, sir.'

I went to the window and peeped down. I saw the young man Peters from Beauchamp Moat, standing in the moonlight below.

'What do you want, my good chap?' asked my professor.

'I'm come over from the Moat, sir. Dr. Norman sent me to see if his wife is here.'

‘Mrs. Norman! No, she is not here, answered my guardian. ‘And nobody is here.’

‘Well, then, I don’t know where else to look for her,’ said the young man, speaking in a high-toned voice, so that I could hear every word. ‘She’s cut away from the Moat, that’s certain.’

‘Cut away! what do you mean?’

‘Gone off, sir. But she was there two hours ago, for she was seen talking to Captain Valentine Bromley.’

I held my breath; the beating of my heart seemed to stifle me.

‘Ah, my good chap, that is all a mistake, for he left this house at ten o’clock to catch the train at Barstow.’

‘But are you sure that he went by that train, sir?’

‘To be sure he did.’

‘Ten o’clock—that’d just about give him time to get over to the Moat by twelve.’

‘I tell you he went by the train. Thunder and lightning! if he said he would go by it, you may be sure he went. And what the *teffle* has that got to do with Mrs. Norman?’

‘Oh, I don’t know, sir. Only it ain’t likely she ran away by herself, is it—and him a-talking to her outside?’

CHAPTER XIII.

FROM THE NARRATIVE OF THE REV. DR. BULLEN.

I WAS awoke from my sleep about two o’clock in the morning of August the 15th, by a single knock at the front door, and I pray forgiveness for the reluctance with which I roused myself up and the disinclination I felt to do my duty; but a man, when three-parts asleep, is not completely master of himself, and I have remarked that at such times his spirit is not capable of exaltation. Although having but little skill in medicine, my parishioners, especially those living in the more distant parts of the parish, never scruple to send for me in case of illness; but as I had reason to believe that they only sent for me when the patient was not sufficiently ill to justify the expense of calling in a doctor, I felt a little sore that they should take advantage of my position in the

middle of the night. Therefore, I was longer dressing than I should have been, and while I was yet struggling to get on my coat the knock was repeated.

I threw up the window and looked out. The moon was upon the back of the house, throwing the front into deep shade, so that I could see nothing. But, as I looked, I fancied I heard a footstep in the road—the night being wonderfully still—and, at the same moment, a woman, with uncovered head, stepped quickly out of the shadow, and going to the gate, which was in the full moonlight, looked up the road in the direction of the approaching steps. As she hurried back she cried, under her breath, and raising her white face and hands to me :

‘Come down! Save me! For the love of Heaven, save me!’

I was not a minute getting downstairs and opening the door. I had not waited even to catch up the lighted candle. As I opened the door the woman passed me, gasping some inarticulate words.

I was only just in time; the garden gate swung open, and a man strode up to the door.

‘Who are you?’ I asked, not sure whether to believe my eyes or not.

‘I am Dr. Norman, and I have come for my wife, who has just entered this house.’

He would have entered the house also, but being a stout man and still sturdy on my legs, I effectively barred the way.

Now, only the day before Mrs. Norman had broken silence upon the subject of her secret terrors, and told me that she believed her husband intended to take her life. I could not think this possible, but was rather inclined to believe that she wronged her husband by a suspicion arising from a morbid hallucination, and so tried to persuade her from her idea.

But I had promised that my house should be her asylum, and that I would stand between her and her husband, and take means to place her in the safe keeping of her friends, should she obtain direct proof of his evil intentions. And now, determined to make that promise good, I told the doctor that while I had the strength to hold my own, no power of his should avail to take Mrs. Norman from my house.

'At least you will listen to argument,' said he.

'Yes,' said I; 'but until I have heard all your wife has to tell, I will not listen to a word you have to say.'

'Very good,' he replied; 'but I warn you that you are subjecting yourself to the gravest responsibility. My wife is not in her sound senses, and you will be chargeable with the consequences of taking her out of my proper care.'

I have never skirked the responsibilities of my actions, and so I told him; whereupon, after a minute's reflection, he turned upon his heel and walked away, saying that he would see me later on, when I should probably regard the matter in another light.

I closed the door, and my old servant Elizabeth, whom I had hastily called in running downstairs, now appearing with a lighted candle, we took poor Mrs. Norman into the sitting-room.

She could not speak for some time, but sat upon the couch with her face buried in her hands, trembling like one in an ague. However, with the aid of Elizabeth, who is every way as good a doctor as myself, and some good brown brandy, I succeeded in bringing her round to a calmer condition of body and mind, when I sent my motherly old servant to prepare the spare bedroom, and begged Mrs. Norman to tell me the cause of her flight.

She waited some minutes silent, as if collecting her thoughts, and then said:

'Tell me if there are serpents here.'

'Serpents!' said I; 'what do you mean, my dear?'

'Snakes, with flat heads and narrow eyes,' she replied, with terror in her voice.

'I have never seen a snake in this country in all my life,' said I. 'If any exist they are rare, and can only be an inoffensive blind worm—a little creature some ten or twelve inches long.'

'There is none a yard long—more than that—with a head shaped like a heart, and with a body like glass?'

'No; I assure you with perfect sincerity that no such creature is to be found here.'

'There was one in my room,' she said, with growing excitement—'upon my bed—a hideous thing, coiled below my pillow. How did it come there?'

The story was so incredible, so like the creation of a dis-

ordered mind, that I feared her reason was gone, as the doctor declared. But not wishing her to see my suspicion, I asked in a serious tone if anyone had seen the snake beside herself.

'Yes,' she answered; 'I fetched Martha from her room; we both saw it—and I fainted. And while I was unconscious, Norman came and took the thing away, and went back to his studies as if nothing had happened. Martha sat with me for some time until I sent her away. But I could not stay in my room alone; I dressed myself and came away; and all along the road I heard Norman following me. And when I hid he stopped, and when I went on he was behind me, always following to catch me and take me back.'

This surely was hallucination.

'We will talk about this in the morning, my dear,' said I, rising as Elizabeth returned to the room; 'and, doubtless, then we shall be able to explain what now seems to us incomprehensible.'

'I know what you mean,' she said, with quick suspicion; 'my husband is coming to-morrow morning. He will explain this to your satisfaction—oh, he will do that!—and then you will let him take me back there. But that he shall not do. I will go away now. I will kill myself rather than return to that house. I will not wait for him to explain.'

'Let him explain as he will,' said I, 'he shall not take you away against your wish. I promise you that—I promise you I will not be persuaded. I promise you that I will telegraph to your friends in London, and send you to them in safety. My dear, you must believe me.'

She stood irresolute for some seconds, and then, dropping her face into her hands, burst into a flood of tears. After that we persuaded the poor soul to go to bed—Elizabeth sleeping in the adjoining room.

Before returning to my room, I wrote a message to Captain Bromley, who had left me his private address, telling him what had happened, and begging him to reply at once as to what I should do; and this message I sent to the telegraph-office on coming down at half-past seven.

I bade Elizabeth take breakfast to Mrs. Norman in her room, and with it I sent up a little note counselling her to

keep her room and lock her door until she felt safe in coming down.

Shortly after nine the gig came up to the garden gate, and Dr. Norman stepped out. I met him at the door and led him into the parlour.

'Where is my wife?' he asked, looking round the room as if he expected to find her there.

'She is upstairs,' I replied.

'I have come to fetch her,' said he.

'Yes; but she does not wish to return with you,' I answered.

'But if I wish it?' he answered coldly.

'That makes not the slightest difference. I shall only consult Mrs. Norman's wishes and my own sense of right.'

'Does your sense of right comprise a regard for the laws of your country?'

'Yes, for those laws which protect the weak. But for the weak not so protected my sense of right makes a law of its own.'

'That is to say, because your view of the proper treatment of mental alienation differs from the scientific view, you feel justified in the abduction of a wife from the lawful keeping of her husband?'

I could make no response, for this was a kind of chop-logic beyond me.

'Come, sir,' he continued, 'show me what feasible objection exists to Mrs. Norman being in my custody. Her intellect is deranged, and I have prescribed for her a course of treatment based upon long study and much experience of mental disorder. Now is it because I am her husband that you think I must be a bad physician, or because I am a physician that I must be a bad husband?'

I knew that if the question were to be decided by reasoning, I might just as well go up and fetch Mrs. Norman down at once; so I replied:

'While I feel I am doing right, no logic in the world shall make me do wrong.'

'If your sense of right won't allow of argument,' said he, 'we will set that aside, and take your other suggestion into consideration. You said that Mrs. Norman should not leave your house against her wish; that implies that you will not detain her against her wish.'

‘Certainly it does,’ said I.

‘Will you permit me to see my wife?’ he asked, with a little air of assurance that seemed to say, ‘We’ll soon settle this business now.’

‘No,’ said I stoutly; ‘I will not permit you to see her.’

‘I do not intend to use physical force. I merely wish to know from her lips that she will not return to her home after I have shown her the wrong she is doing by leaving it.’

But I would not agree to this; for, thought I, if I am no match for him in reasoning, how ill will she come off! Besides, I knew not what trick he might have up his sleeve, as it were; or what influence his unspoken intentions might have in overawing her. I remembered how the dumb beasts on whom he experimented had cowered in submissive terror at the mere sight of his face.

‘Have you any objection to listening to reason yourself?’ he asked.

I told him I had none, and I determined inwardly that he might reason until he was black in the face before ever I would be misled by his sophistries.

‘The acute form of hypochondria which is the present phase of my wife’s disorder,’ he began, ‘has led her lately to imagine that she was being poisoned. She believes that I have been slowly poisoning her. How absurd that supposition is you may imagine by the fact that I have made no secret of my studies in toxicology, which would in the event of her death at once direct an inquiry, which, if it failed to convict me of a stupid murder, would at least blast my prospects as a man of science. I have gone so far as to show you the means of detecting the presence of that poison, and this would show a reckless or imbecile regard to my own safety inconsistent with the character of a diabolical miscreant. But last night an accident occurred which threw her hypochondriacal misgivings into a new channel. A viper was found in her room.’

‘It is true that a snake lay on her bed?’

‘Perfectly true. It is one of a collection I bought some time since of Jamrach, a London dealer; their venom was necessary to my studies. They were inclosed in a box fastened with bolts and a padlock, the key of which I kept in my pocket. I was not sure of the number, but it seemed to me on the morning after I brought them home that there

was one less than I had bargained for. As I had not opened the box before, and had kept the key on a ring with several others, I conceived that I was in error or that the man Jamrach had managed to deceive me. That morning I drew the poison-fangs of every snake in the box. You follow?’

I nodded, and he continued :

‘Last night, when my wife’s cry took me to her room, I was astonished to see a snake there ; but on taking it up I was still more astonished to find that its poison-fangs were not drawn. I recognised also that this was the snake missing from my collection. Necessarily, therefore, it had escaped from the box before I opened it on the morning after bringing them from London. My suspicions fell at once upon a young man employed in my laboratory, whose ill-concealed terror in moving about the laboratory had aroused my suspicion. I went to his room and discovered amongst his effects a picklock. With the snake in my hand, I taxed him with having gone to the box to satisfy his curiosity. I have brought the fellow with me—he is now in the gig. Call him in and put what questions you like to him, and you will find that I am as guiltless of this ridiculous charge of attempting to kill my wife with a snake as with slow poison. The one charge contradicts the other—for why should I employ a viper when using an internal poison, or why an internal poison when employing a viper ? But call Peters in ; his statement may be more convincing than my argument.’

‘No,’ said I, rising ; ‘if I cannot believe you I cannot believe your man ; and neither argument nor statement of any kind shall shake my resolution, which is to keep Mrs. Norman until her friends whom she does not dread can take her into their charge.’

‘If you will not give her up without legal compulsion, I must seek legal aid—an alternative which I should gladly avoid in consideration to the position of one who has, I am sure, none but the kindest feelings for my unhappy wife.’

‘Take your alternative, sir, and never mind me or my position,’ said I, and so we parted.

But I own I was not so indifferent as I pretended ; for, not knowing how the law might stand on this subject, I greatly feared he would get power from a magistrate to

return with a constable and take Mrs. Norman out of my hands before I got an answer to my telegram.

I was not concerned a button about my position or such stuff; my only fear was for Mrs. Norman.

For, though every word Dr. Norman had spoken might be as true as Holy Writ, I was still convinced that such treatment as her husband thought fit was in fact thoroughly unfit for one in her condition, and this notwithstanding that he was a man of learning and I only a rustic in comparison.

Mrs. Norman still kept her room, albeit I had sent Elizabeth up to tell her that her husband was gone; but to give her courage I went into the garden and did a little budding of roses—very badly—where she might see me from her room window. Yet I was little in humour for such delicate work, for as my church clock struck quarter after quarter I kept wondering why a reply did not come to my despatch, and I was greatly vexed to think how indifferently I had replied to Dr. Norman's arguments, when now I could find a dozen telling things to say.

A little before twelve Mrs. Norman came down. After pressing her hand, I put it through my arm and took her round the garden, and without hinting at her husband's theory of her mental condition, I told her what he had said in explanation of the snake being in her room.

She was silent for a time, and then she said:

'If this is true—and you seem to think it is—then I have wronged him. And if I have wronged him in this I have wronged him in other things, and I am not a good wife.'

At this juncture I heard the postman at the door, and presently down came Elizabeth, as fast as her old legs could trot, with a telegram. It was from Captain Bromley, and ran thus:

'I was out when telegram came. I shall stay here until I hear again from you. Send Edith to London by next train, and telegraph from the station to me. I will be at the terminus to meet her.'

I put the paper in her hand, and said:

'We will have dinner, and go over to Barstow in a fly from the George; and you shall go to London, where you're more likely to be a good wife than locked up in a ruin with no kindly voice to cheer you on your way.'

And after dinner we drove to Barstow—Elizabeth having

previously purchased in Litley a bonnet and shawl for Mrs. Norman, which, though a little fine, reflected great credit on the old woman's judgment—and at Barstow I put the young wife in a first-class compartment. She was quite alone there. She preferred that, and as I saw she still feared being taken by her husband, I bade her pull down the blinds and enjoy the trumpery I had picked up on the bookstall in the form of a cheap romance. She could only express her gratitude with tears, which I would willingly have gone without. I pressed her hand, she drew down the blinds, and I gave the guard half a crown to lock the door and take care of her.

CHAPTER XIV

FROM THE NARRATIVE OF THOMAS CRAIK.

I VENTURE to say that very few young fellows in my position would have regarded the future without a feeling of despair and a belief that it would be best to try something else as a means of getting a living, and I admit that as I returned to my room after this unfortunate termination of the snake affair, I perceived that I might look for an immediate dismissal from Beauchamp Moat; but I had such confidence in my own abilities that my mind was more occupied in preparing for fresh encounters than in dwelling on past mishaps.

My brain being thus occupied, I was wide awake when about midnight Dr. Norman came to my door and ordered me to get up at once, as he required me to go to Faulcondale and see if Mrs. Norman was at Mr. Schlobach's.

I did not require twice telling. I did not doubt that Mrs. Norman had run away—I had laid the temptation of flight in her way the day before by telling her that Captain Bromley was at Faulcondale—but I doubted that she had gone to Faulcondale at this hour. Rather it seemed to me that the crafty Captain had found means to communicate with her, and had himself fetched her—a supposition which agreed entirely with my knowledge of his real character.

However, I lost no time in going over to Faulcondale, for this event offered me admirable means of exciting he

sluggish suspicions of the folks there, and arousing them to the actual danger of the situation. Every light was out, and I knew at once that Mrs. Norman was not there. But I woke up the household with a loud and long ring at the bell, and when the professor, with a white nightcap on his head, looked out of window and told me that Mrs. Norman had not sought refuge under that roof, I led him to believe that she had been talking to Captain Bromley outside the Moat, and that they must have gone away together. In this I did not stick entirely to what I knew had taken place, but rather to what I believed must have happened.

I was undeceived on my return to the Moat, when Dr. Norman told me that Mrs. Norman was at Orwell parsonage.

‘You will have the gig at the door by eight o’clock—and be prepared to go with me,’ he added. ‘It may be necessary for you to tell the whole truth concerning the snake you allowed to escape from the case. I advise you for once to tell the exact truth; the slightest deviation will compel me to expose all I know about you.’

I had already come to the conclusion that he knew me and my purpose in coming to the Moat; I now was convinced. I determined to act upon his advice and tell the whole truth about the snake if I should be called upon to do so.

I saw that Mrs. Norman had not eloped with Captain Bromley, and that she was about to be brought back to the Moat. After that I should be sent about my business; that was clear also.

We drove over to Orwell, and while Dr. Norman was in the passage I sat in the gig, expecting every moment to be called in to tell the truth—a most uncomfortable position for anyone who values his self-respect. However, I escaped that mortification.

After a considerable space of time Dr. Norman came from the house, followed by the old parson. Neither of them spoke; they exchanged a cold, stiff bow, and my master came to the gig with an expression on his face which would have defied anybody to understand. I could never make out by his looks at any time what his real feelings were.

He had evidently foreseen what was to be done in the event of Mrs. Norman refusing to return to the Moat, for as he stepped lightly into the gig he said ‘Lipley,’ and when

we were going in that direction, and nearing the cross lane that strikes into the new London road, he added, 'Turn to the left,' and again when we approached the London road, 'To the left.'

Following these directions, we now spun along, our backs to Lipley, our faces to Faulcondale.

What was his object? Did he intend to call upon Professor Schlobach?

'Faulcondale, sir, or Barstow?'

'Barstow,' he replied; and leaning back in the corner of the hood with his hat tilted over his eyes, he crossed his arms and composed himself to sleep. The breeze annoyed him; he roused himself up impatiently, drew the green curtain half-way across, and then again arranged himself in a comfortable position for dozing.

I also drew back in the hood, though not to go to sleep; for it struck me that if we met the old foreigner he would want to know the news about Mrs. Norman, and I did not wish what I had said about her talking to Captain Bromley to come out before the doctor.

And just as I had feared, as we came in sight of the old farm-house, I caught sight of the professor with a long pipe in his hand, talking to the postman.

'Tis ten to one but he knows the gig,' said I to myself, and gave the horse a sharp stroke with the whip that put him to a better pace.

The professor was facing us, and evidently he did know the gig, for he stepped forward to the side of the path.

I glanced sidelong at the doctor; his hat had got on to the bridge of his nose, his head being wedged in the corner of the hood, and his mouth was partly open; then I glanced at the professor, who was now not more than a dozen yards off. He held up his finger as a signal; but pretending not to see him, nor to hear his 'Hi, young chap!' I gave the horse another cut that quickened his pace to a gallop, and so I passed that danger.

Dr. Norman slept for some time—that was natural, seeing that he had slept scarcely more than I during the night—but at length rousing himself, he put his hat on the back of his head, rubbed his eyes, stretched his arms, and looking out, said in some surprise:

'Have we passed Faulcondale?'

'Yes, sir,' I answered, 'and we're pretty nigh Barstow.'

He rubbed his glasses in silence, and putting them on, said:

'You can put up the gig at the inn by the station, and wait there for me. If I don't return to-day, you can sleep there. Get what you need to eat and drink. But don't leave the inn until you see me.'

'Very good, sir,' said I, wondering what on earth he was after now.

I set him down at the station, and drove the gig to the inn, which is close by. From the stable yard there is a fair view of the up platform. I stood up in the gig, and casting my eye that way I saw the doctor standing beside a porter with his back turned to the people on the platform and some distance from them, writing in his note-book.

I took notice of the porter, and observed that he had a red face and a little sandy whisker.

I put my horse up and sat down, weighing up everything in my mind, until the train had gone; then I strolled off to the station, where, with very little search, I found the red-faced porter with the little sandy whisker.

I waited till he was alone, and seemingly waiting for someone to come and recommence conversation, and then I lounged up to him.

'Fine day,' said I.

He nodded, and waited with his mouth half open for me to tell him what I wanted.

'You can't tell me where my governor's gone, can you?' I asked.

'Who's your governor?'

'The gentleman who was talking to you before the up-train came in,' said I.

'Dr. Norman?' he asked.

I nodded, not a little surprised that he knew the doctor's name, he being so close in a general way.

'What do you want to know for?' he asked, with a stupid grin on his face.

'Why, I'll tell you,' said I. 'He told me to wait here till he comes back. Well, if he's gone to London, I don't want to hang about here all day; but if he's only gone a little distance to see a patient, I don't want to be out of the way when he comes back, or I shall get the sack.'

'He ain't gone to London, then.'

'Oh, if he's only gone to Boxham——' said I.

'And he ain't gone to Boxham,' said the porter, who seemed to fancy he was knowing.

'If he ain't gone to London, he must have gone to Boxham,' said I, putting on a little artfulness to draw him out.

'No, he ain't gone to neither,' replied he, with a grin more knowing than ever, 'because he's gone to Holdness Junction, there now.'

I pretended to be very much puzzled by this.

'Anyhow,' said I, in conclusion, 'if he's only gone to Holdness, he may be back by the next train, and so it ain't worth risking one good place for the sake of another; though it ain't every day we get the chance of a comfortable home and eighteen shillings a week.'

'Eighteen shillings a week and a comfortable home!' said he in astonishment.

'Yes, and a nice, pretty, fat housemaid, too.'

'Where's that?' he asked.

'Oh, a good long way from here,' said I; and seeing I had tickled his curiosity, and excited his envy as well, I turned off the subject and went to look at the time bill.

When the down-train had passed through, the red-faced porter strolled up to me and asked if I was going out to have a glass. I accepted the invitation, and we went to the inn, and there, after beating about the bush, he began to question me about the comfortable home, eighteen shillings a week, and the fat housemaid. But I pretended to fight shy, knowing he would tell me his secret, if he had one, to get at mine. When a countryman thinks he is clever, he never fails to fall into this trap.

'Your master's a rum un,' he said.

'Not a bad sort,' said I.

'Fond of the ladies, ain't he?'

'I should think he is, too,' and we grinned at one another.

'Do you know Dr. Bullen, the minister?' he asked.

'Oh, yes; I know him,' said I.

'He's going to send a lady up to London, ain't he?'

'I heard him say something about it last night when he came to see the governor,' I replied, without letting him see my delight in picking up this information.

'Well, your governor's gave me two shillings to wire him the number of the carriage as Mr. Bullen puts the lady into.'

'Well, I never!' I exclaimed. 'I wonder what the governor's wife 'd say if she knew that!'

'Do you know what I'd do if I was in your place?' asked this clever young fellow.

'Tell the missus?'

'Not me. But I'd sort of threaten it, and make the governor pay me to keep quiet. If you was only to be spry, you could make a heap o' money out of this.'

I pretended to be very much taken with this brilliant suggestion, said I should stick to my place, and then without reserve told him that the old German gentleman at Faulcondale was the person who wanted a man-servant. The professor did not want one as a matter of fact, but it was no harm to give my friend a little exercise, and indulge his mind in the pleasures of hope.

The next up-train left Barstow at 4.45, so I had plenty of time to think out the subject and make my plans.

The case was pretty clear. Mrs. Norman had refused to return to Beauchamp Moat, and the doctor knew or had reason to believe that the parson would send her in the course of the day to her friends in London. Her friends in London meant Captain Bromley; for however Mrs. Norman might mislead the soft old clergyman, she could not deceive her jealous husband. His intention was to cut off her escape. For that purpose he had gone to Holdness Junction, where all trains stop, and had bribed the porter to telegraph the number of the carriage in which she travelled. The telegram would reach him long before the arrival of the train, and he had but to take his wife from the carriage and bring her back to Barstow, where the gig was in waiting to carry her thence to the Moat.

Now, should I upset this nice little arrangement or not? What had I to gain by suffering Mrs. Norman to be caught and taken back to the Moat? Nothing. On the other hand, what had I to gain by facilitating her escape? Much. It was not unlikely that the event of the night before had already excited Miss Howard's jealousy and suspicions. Those feelings would be confirmed if Mrs. Norman were thrown under the protection of Captain Bromley.

But there was yet another advantage to be gained by siding with Mrs. Norman against her husband. Captain Bromley would be under a moral obligation to accept my services, upon my representing that I had lost my place at the Moat by my devotion to Mrs. Norman. And it was only by getting into his service, by making myself acquainted with his movements, and worming out his secrets, that I could succeed in discovering the important part of the missing letter, without which the mere obstruction of his marriage with Miss Howard could bring me no advantage.

I determined to save Mrs. Norman. How?

The first means that came to my mind was to overbribe the clever porter. But there was danger in this. He was just cunning enough to take my money and cheat me at the same time, seeing a possible gain to be made out of Dr. Norman, and nothing would have pleased him better than to overreach me.

My next idea was to go along the road and warn the clergyman and Mrs. Norman; but there the advantage would have been more on Mrs. Norman's side than mine.

The best way of forcing Captain Bromley's recognition was to pilot Mrs. Norman to her destination in London, and make her conscious of the fate from which she had been saved.

This suggested the plan upon which I resolved to act.

I kept out of the clever porter's way, that he might not suspect my object, and sitting in the stable-yard, kept an eye on the entrance to the booking-office.

About a quarter past four a covered fly drove up, and out of it stepped Mr. Bullen. I was too far away to see if he had left anyone in the fly. He went into the station, and, coming out with his watch in his hand, spoke to someone in the fly; then he opened the door, addressing a few words to the driver, got into the carriage, and they drove off. I saw the clever porter come to the door and look after them with his goggle eyes starting from his head and his face blank with astonishment. To me the explanation was simple enough. There was half an hour to spare, and Mrs. Norman, fearful of being pursued by her husband, dreaded to be seen in the waiting-room. As I expected, the carriage returned in twenty minutes, and then the old parson handed Mrs. Norman out, and took her into the station.

I waited till I saw them on the up platform ; then I went over to the station, and making sure that the clever porter was not in sight, I took a first-class ticket to London at the booking-office.

It was necessary that neither Dr. Bullen nor Mrs. Norman should see me at that time ; so I waited in the booking-office until the train ran in, then I went on the platform.

At the foremost end of the train I saw the guard in conference with the parson. The carriage-door was open, the guard closed and locked it, and the parson put something into his hand.

The passengers were nearly all in ; the clever porter was running along slamming the doors—he had yet a dozen or so to shut. As he passed me, he said hurriedly :

‘Remember—first, two-four-five.’

I nodded ; it was an instruction I was not likely to forget ; and as he ran on, banging door after door, I stepped into the nearest compartment, and shut myself in.

The passengers who had alighted were streaming along towards the way out as the train moved on ; amongst them I saw the old parson with his eyes fixed upon the departing train in grave solicitude, and I thought how odd it was that he at one end of the platform and the porter at the other should be both occupied with the destiny of Mrs. Norman, and each hopeful of a successful result of their contrary efforts, whilst I alone, unknown to them, was master of her fate.

It was a parliamentary train—a fact I had been careful to discover before starting—and when it stopped at the next station, I got down and ran along the platform till I came to the compartment of the first-class carriage marked 245. The blinds were drawn ; I tried the handle. The guard came up, and glancing at me, said :

‘What are you at there ? Lots of room in the third.’

I showed him my ticket. He opened the next compartment.

‘Here’s a carriage all to yourself. Look sharp, or you’ll be left behind.’

‘I’m a detective,’ said I, dropping my voice. ‘And I must know whether the woman put in this compartment by a man got up as a clergyman, who gave you a gratuity to lock the door, is the party I’m after.’

‘You can set your mind at rest about that,’ said he. ‘I was born at Orwell, and know Parson Bullen well enough to answer for it he wouldn’t have anything to do with parties you’re after. I’m guard of this train, and it’s my duty to take care of the females that’s in it. If you’ve got anything else to say, you must say it at the next station. Now, are you going on or not?’ he asked, holding the handle with one hand, and pulling out his whistle with the other.

Here was an unexpected difficulty: there was no time for further argument, if that would have availed; I got into the compartment. The guard slammed the door, whistled, and the train started.

There was only one more station before arriving at Holdenness. How was I, in the brief interval of its stopping at that station, to overcome the objections of the guard and persuade Mrs. Norman to get out? I saw that it was next to impossible.

I went to the other side of the carriage and tried the door; it was unlocked. The probability, then, was that all the doors on that side were unlocked. All that was needed to get into the next compartment with Mrs. Norman was a little firmness of nerve and hand. I stood for a minute or two with the door half open screwing up my courage. Then, jamming my hat tighter on my head, I turned round, put my left foot on the step, and, grasping the brass rail beside the door, lowered my right on to the footboard. I pulled the door to and turned the handle. I passed the door, and grasping the next brass, stepped along the footboard with my face to the carriage, never leaving hold of one brass until I had got my hand firmly on the next; and so I got to the adjoining compartment and turned the handle. The door opened, I put my foot upon the step, and the next moment stood in the presence of Mrs. Norman.

Looking at a carriage as it stands beside the platform, this feat looks the simplest and easiest imaginable; but with that same carriage spinning along at a rate of thirty miles an hour, oscillating, and in a fresh breeze, the thing is not so easily done. My heart beat, my hair grew crisp on my head, and I dared not look at anything but the carriage before me as I passed along.

The rattle of the wheels overpowered the sound made in

turning the handle and opening the door. Mrs. Norman, sitting at the further end of the compartment, with her eyes closed, was unconscious of my entrance. It was only when I pulled the door to and turned the handle again that she opened her eyes and saw me. She gave a cry of alarm, and rose.

‘What do you want?’ she asked, with her hand on the door.

I begged her not to be alarmed, and told her that I had come to save her. Then I gave her a circumstantial account of what had happened, not deviating in a single instance from the exact truth—so far as concerned my transactions with the porter; but it seems as if women could more readily be brought to believe falsehood than truth, for she seemed anything but convinced of my good intentions when my story was finished.

‘I assure you upon my word, upon my oath, I swear it,’ said I, with all the emphasis I could put on, ‘that your husband is waiting at Holdness to take you back to Beauchamp Moat, and that the porter at Barstow has telegraphed to him the number of the carriage in which he is to find you. Your only hope of escape is in getting down at the station we are coming to, and going on to London by the next train.’

‘No, no!’ she replied with excitement; ‘I cannot believe you; you are in league with him to betray me. It is you who will telegraph to him, telling him where to find me, if I do as you ask me.’

The train was slackening; in another moment we should be at the station. The thought that her wrongheadedness would ruin all my hopes terrified me. I swore again that she was wrong, that I had no object but to save her from Dr. Norman. When I was still speaking the train stopped.

‘I implore you,’ said I, ‘to listen to reason—to get down here—to escape while yet you have the chance.’

She rose with an expression of bewilderment, and I saw that I was about to succeed.

I turned the handle of the door, and then called to the porter to come and unlock it. The porter came crawling towards the carriage, fumbling in his pocket for a key. Another minute would have saved all; but while the porter was still feeling in his pockets, the guard bustled up and all was lost.

‘Hullo, my young friend ; you’ve got in, have you, and can’t get out ! Don’t you move, ma’am,’ he added, addressing Mrs. Norman. ‘I know this young fellow. Calls himself a detective—we’ll see about that. It’s all right, ma’am ; don’t you be frightened. There’s a little game here that isn’t good enough to be played off on me.’

I remonstrated, expostulated, said all I could ; but to no purpose. The guard opened the door, pushing me back into the compartment, got in, blew his whistle, and shut the door as the train started. I was too bitterly disheartened even to show the guard what a fool he was ; I sank into the seat and sat in moody silence until the train stopped at Holdness.

As the guard opened the door I caught sight of Dr. Norman on the platform, side by side with an inspector of police.

‘There he is,’ I cried ; ‘now will you believe me ?’

But it was too late. As Dr. Norman came to the door his wife fell back on the seat fainting. And in that condition she was lifted out of the carriage and carried into the station.

‘You are a blundering, conceited idiot !’ said Dr. Norman as he passed me. That was the only attention I received.

CHAPTER XV.

CONTINUED FROM THE NARRATIVE OF THOMAS CRAIK.

DR. NORMAN for once lost his temper, or he would never have uttered those words. Had he reflected but a minute he would have foreseen the effect that taunt had upon me. But of that more hereafter.

Galled and disappointed, I continued my journey to London ; but soon perceiving the folly of giving way to idle regrets, I set my wits to work and laid down a plan by which I might turn this mishap to advantage, and profit by the unexpected change of circumstances.

I saw Captain Bromley on the platform at the terminus. After giving him time to assure himself that Mrs. Norman had not come, I went up to him and gave him a truthful account of what had happened, only concealing my real

motives and leading him to suppose that sympathy with the unfortunate Mrs. Norman was my sole incentive.

'I'd do anything for that poor lady, sir,' said I, in a whining voice, 'and put no price upon my services. But it isn't every day a young fellow can find such a situation as I had at that house; and if you could put my action in a favourable light, sir, and say a good word for me, perhaps the doctor would take me back again.'

'You shall not be a loser by your service,' he said, and then, bidding me wait for him, he went into the telegraph office.

When he returned he dismissed a brougham that was waiting, and then, giving me a sovereign and his card, told me to meet him at his address—Fairlawn, Wimbledon—in a couple of hours. I was there in an hour.

Captain Bromley was not at home. I showed the card, and after a little parley I was taken down into the kitchen; and now, being in the enemy's camp, I began to look about me.

There were four or five servants. Most of them were busy in the dining-room upstairs, or in the cooking department; but one young woman had nothing better to do than to trot about gossiping with one and another, and showing off before me. She interested me.

Her name was Esther. She was a tall, handsome girl, with narrow, roving eyes, but a prim, modest bearing, dressed very neatly, and very prettily at the same time—what the servant agents call 'a very superior-looking person'—the sort of young person who gets too much attention from gentlemen, and usually gives up service after a short experience to go on the stage as a chorister. 'If anyone knows Captain Bromley's secrets,' said I to myself, 'you do.'

She pretended to take no notice of me, but I saw she was showing off on my account; for these girls are like hawks: they will fly at any game, and nothing is too small for them. I drew her on by feigning indifference. She came bustling up to look for something (which of course she never found) in the dresser-drawer near me; while she was there she said carelessly:

'I suppose you have come after a situation?'

'No,' said I; 'I've a good situation in the country.'

'What as?'

'Doctor's assistant—laboratory work.'

'What's your master's name?' she asked quickly.

'Dr. Norman.'

She bent over the drawer, and lowering her voice, asked if I had come with Mrs. Norman.

'Half-way,' I replied.

Without moving her head, she turned her sly eyes towards the servant who had just come into the kitchen, and pursed up her lips as a signal to be discreet and not talk too loud.

'What do you mean by "half-way"?' she asked, in a low tone.

'Mrs. Norman's gone back,' I replied, in the same tone.

'Gone back—with Captain Bromley?'

'No, with her husband. He stopped her half-way.'

I watched her face closely. I expected to see her pleased; but instead of that a look of irritation came over her countenance. Evidently she was not jealous of Mrs. Norman. But why was she vexed at her not coming?

'Your governor's pretty fond of her, ain't he?' I asked.

She did not think fit to answer that question. Clearly it was one she had considered.

'I suppose Dr. Norman and Captain Bromley are not friends?' she said.

'They were—at least, they pretended to be. I don't know how they will go on now. Is this Captain Bromley's house?' She made no objection to answering that question.

'No; this is Mrs. Bromley's. Captain Bromley has only been staying here since she had the attack,' she said; and then she returned to the former subject, asking questions about Dr. Norman and his wife, their character, looks, etc., and when she had learnt all I was willing she should know, she left me.

I saw that she had got hold of a secret, though what it was I could not make out. It had nothing to do with the affair I was after, for she showed no interest in talking of Captain Bromley, but kept harping on Mrs. Norman.

It was obvious that she had not yet decided what use to make of her discovery, and was feeling about, as it were, to find which course it would be best to take. I did not attach much importance to this matter. In every household there are secrets, and the women-servants almost invariably get hold of them. But although women are un-

equalled in ferreting out secrets by eavesdropping, and skilfully joining odds and ends, overhearing small-talk, prying into drawers, opening letters, and so forth, they very rarely have sense enough to turn their discoveries to advantage. They are like a young beginner at pocket-picking, who gets hold of a watch, and can't for the life of him tell what to do with it. They have no constructive ability, that's the fact; and their actions are governed by temper. I have known women in a moment of passion, and just to gratify a transient feeling of spite, blab out a secret acquired with the utmost patience and ingenuity, and which, properly employed, might have brought them in hundreds of pounds. I set this young woman down in my mind as no better than the rest; but I determined not to lose sight of her, and if possible to find out all she knew; for one secret always involves another, and you may sometimes come upon the horse you are looking for, so to speak, in running after the cart it's harnessed to.

I had no chance, however, of making any further pursuit in that direction then; Captain Bromley coming in, I was called upstairs to meet him. He asked me many questions relative to Mrs. Norman, and the events preceding her flight, all of which I answered as truthfully as was necessary; and then he dismissed me, telling me to call the morning after the next at eleven o'clock.

At ten o'clock on Thursday I rang the servants' bell at Fairlawn, thinking it was not amiss to be early. As I hoped, Esther opened the gate, and I could not but admire her as she came down from the house with her elegant figure, her smart dress, and the demure air on her pretty face. Seeing me she smiled, without parting her pursed-up lips, and with her expressive sly eyes gave me to understand that we could be seen from the house.

'Captain Bromley is at breakfast,' said she, 'but you can come in and sit down in the hall. I want to speak to you.'

She led the way into the house as sedate as a Quakeress.

When I was seated in the hall, she took a feather brush, went to the head of the kitchen stairs, cast an eye down a passage leading from the hall, and came towards me dusting the plates and ornaments hung on the wall. When she was near enough to speak in a low tone without being heard except by me, she said:

'I am going out this evening; have you anything to do?'

'That depends upon your master,' said I, in a low tone.

'He won't want you after this morning.'

'In that case I shall have no engagement this evening.'

At this moment a bell sounded, and she left me with a look of vexation, went down the passage leading from the hall, and opened a door. Then I heard Captain Bromley say:

'Send Peters to me.'

She returned, beckoned me, and I went into the breakfast-room, where Captain Bromley was sitting. The window looked on to the carriage drive, and he had seen me.

'I wish you to take this letter,' said he, closing a letter he had just written. 'That is the address,' he added, handing the letter to me after blotting the writing on it.

'Yes, sir,' said I, reading the address—E. Grote, Esq., Pelham Chambers, Victoria Street; and then I put it in my pocket, where I slipped my finger under the freshly-closed flap and disengaged it. 'May I make so bold, sir, as to ask if you have heard from Mrs. Norman?'

I asked this question feeling sure that he had spent the preceding day in trying to get Mrs. Norman out of her husband's hands, and it was important I should know the result.

'Mrs. Norman is at the Moat,' he answered.

'She has got better of her fright, I hope?'

'I believe so,' he replied.

This made it clear that he had tried and failed to withdraw her, and that he had not even been allowed to see her.

'It is with reference to Mrs. Norman that I am sending you to Mr. Grote now. He wishes to hear from you the particulars you gave me the day before yesterday. You have money?'

'Yes, sir; I have not spent half of the sovereign you were so good as to give me.'

'I shall see you again at Mr. Grote's chambers. By-the-by,' he added, as I was about to leave the room, 'how was it you came to make that extraordinary statement to Professor Schlobach concerning me? You told him, I believe, that you saw me in conversation with Mrs. Norman at the Moat at twelve o'clock on the night she left.'

'Wasn't it you, sir?' I asked innocently.

'Certainly not.'

'Then it must have been Martha, sir. I could only just see two figures in the shadow as I looked out of the laboratory window, and knowing you were at Faulcondale in the afternoon, I made sure it must be you. No offence, I hope, sir?'

'Oh no,' he answered lightly; 'but you would do well to be more careful in future.'

Captain Bromley's feelings were always betrayed by the expression of his face and voice; and I judged by them now that my attempt to create a breach between him and Miss Howard had failed, or been patched up.

As I went through the hall Esther accompanied me to the door.

'I shall be in the waiting-room of the Putney station at eight o'clock to-night,' she whispered.

'So shall I,' said I, touching her pretty soft hand as it held the door. She nodded, smiled, and shot me through with her dark, narrow eyes. 'I shall have to be on my guard with that young lady,' said I to myself.

The letter I had to give to Mr. Grote was scarcely worth the opening; it simply introduced the 'bearer' as the lad who had tried to save Mrs. Norman, and might be 'an important witness on our side'; but it prepared me to meet the lawyer, and intimated that an attempt was to be made to obtain a legal separation of Mrs. Norman from her husband.

I got to Pelham Chambers shortly after eleven, and found Mr. Grote's office very different to my old master's, Mr. Gardener's; they looked more like a gentleman's private rooms than a lawyer's chambers, nor was Mr. Grote less unlike Mr. Gardener; but I knew him at once for a lawyer.

He was a stout elderly gentleman, with white hair, and a full, rather florid face, clean shaved, and might have passed for a well-to-do country squire; but there was no mistaking his quick gray eyes: they were a lawyer's, and such as I have never seen except in a lawyer's head.

He had Captain Bromley's letter before him, which the gentlemanly clerk in the outer room had taken from me, and he looked at me carefully, as if to judge by my appearance how I was to be tackled. He adopted the genial, open, candid style.

'Well, my good fellow,' said he cheerfully, 'I hear you have shown considerable shrewdness, tact, and courage in attempting to rescue Mrs. Norman from a perilous position. I conclude it must have been perilous, or you would not have risked so much in her behalf. Now, there is no occasion to make any mystery of this case. We have reason to believe that Mrs. Norman has been cruelly treated by her husband; if we have sufficient evidence to support that belief, we shall take the case into court; if not, that course must be abandoned. In either event your services will be paid for, you understand. But as it is of the very first importance that our evidence shall be reliable, I must urge upon you the necessity of exaggerating nothing, reserving nothing, and telling only those facts which have come under your own observation; not only for the sake of this poor lady, whose sufferings have awakened your generous sympathy, but also with regard to your own personal advantage. Now then, let me hear all you have to say.'

I told him as much as I wished him to know, being very careful of my statements, for I saw that this stout old gentleman was sharp enough to catch me up in any discrepancy, and when I had come to the end, and he had praised me warmly for my straightforward and honest statement, he proceeded to cross-examine me as if every word I had uttered was a lie. But I managed to hold my own without being tricked into an admission that would falsify my previous statement.

He had come pretty nearly to the end of his game when Captain Bromley arrived.

I was sent into an outer office while they discussed, and much I regretted that these were not Mr. Gardener's offices, where I might have overheard all they had to say about me. When I was called in again, Captain Bromley was standing looking out of the window.

'We have no further need of you at present,' said Mr. Grote; 'but we may have before long, so you will let us know where you are to be found. Captain Bromley wishes you to accept this cheque as a recompense for the loss of your situation, and a reward for your services to Mrs. Norman.'

'I don't wish to be rewarded, sir,' said I; 'I only wish to obtain another situation, and if Captain Bromley can give me employment it is all I want.'

Captain Bromley shook his head, and, turning, said :

‘ No, Peters, I can’t do that.’

‘ No,’ added Mr. Grote, ‘ that is impracticable ; but we will try and find a suitable place for you. In the meanwhile you can live very comfortably on this.’ He handed me a cheque, which was for fifty pounds, and after I had expressed my gratitude and a few more instructions had been given me relative to forwarding my address, I left Pelham Chambers very well content with myself, albeit I had failed in many things, and seemed as far as ever from recovering the stolen letter.

The first thing I did was to change the cheque, and next I bought a complete suit of gentlemanly clothes ; for though my ruling passion was criminal investigation, I was not above the weakness of youth, and must admit that I was smitten by Esther, notwithstanding a very strong suspicion that her amiable glances were due to a selfish desire to get at my secret.

That young lady hardly knew me when I took off my hat to her in the waiting-room of the Putney station. She thrilled me with a glance of approval, and when we left the station was not ashamed to take my arm, though she herself was dressed like a lady and looked extremely genteel. We talked upon general subjects for a time, but at length she worked round to business, and asked me point-blank what had taken place at the lawyer’s. And now I saw that I must get the nonsense out of my head and look out for myself. Her object was to discover my secret ; mine was to find out hers.

‘ How do you know that I went to a lawyer’s ?’ I asked.

‘ That is not an answer to my question,’ said she.

‘ Well,’ said I, ‘ the most important part of the affair was that the lawyer gave me a cheque for fifty pounds.’

‘ They gave you fifty pounds to hold your tongue !’ she exclaimed in surprise.

‘ And not too much neither,’ said I, hoping to draw her on.

‘ No,’ said she reflectively ; ‘ I suppose they would give twice as much as that to keep it hushed up.’

Although this observation about hushing it up gave me no little surprise, I concealed the feeling, and answered at once :

'Twice as much ! I mean to have ten times as much—twenty times as much before I've done with it.'

'How?' she asked, after looking at me sidelong with a good deal of interest.

'Ah ! now you're asking too much,' said I, laughing.

'Oh, I dare say you are not more clever than other people,' said she, piqued, and in a tone of contempt. 'I suppose you threatened to tell who this *Mrs. Norman* was?'

Now, this at once let me into the nature of her secret, and convinced me that her knowledge had nothing to do with the stolen letter.

'I've no doubt I shall be able to get fifty pounds as easily as you have,' she continued.

'That depends upon how you go about it. If you think you can levy black-mail upon such people as Captain Bromley and his lawyer you're very much mistaken. If you're wise you won't do anything of that sort. Look how silly it is. If I had said this morning, "Now then, give me fifty pounds, or I'll tell all I know," do you think I should have got it? No. They'd have sent me about my business without a penny-piece. And what could I have done then? Nothing. It would do me no good to betray *Mrs. Norman*; it would only make it impossible for me to get a situation or do any good for myself. It would be sheer madness to do that—ruinous madness, only fit for a silly school-girl to indulge in.'

She seemed to see the force of this argument; she said nothing for some minutes, and when she did speak it was in a less disdainful tone.

'I can't tell how you did it,' she said.

'No; but you shall one of these days, when we are better acquainted.'

'Aren't we good friends now?' she said coaxingly, with a little squeeze at my arm.

There was a little nonsense, and then she said:

'Now, won't you tell me?'

It was the old story of Samson and Delilah.

'Well,' said I, weakened, but not yet quite a fool, 'I got fifty pounds for being kind to *Mrs. Norman*;' and then I told her how I had tried to save her from the doctor.

'I know all that,' said she, still perplexed. Then after a moment's reflection she cried, 'I see now how you did it.'

You did this service for Mrs. Norman to give them an excuse for paying you a sum of money, but you took care beforehand to let them know that you had found out who she was.'

'No,' said I, anxious to prevent her spoiling my game ; 'I tell you if they suspected that I was levying black-mail they would have nothing more to do with me. They are at liberty to imagine what they like.'

'You are very artful.'

'Well, we must live ; and I don't mean to be a servant all my life.'

'Nor I either.' She took time to make a mental calculation ; then she said, 'Do you think you can make ten thousand pounds?'

'I am sure of it.'

'What are you going to do next?'

'Anything that may be of service to Mrs. Norman.'

After walking some minutes in silence she said :

'As our secret wouldn't be worth anything if it were known to all the world, I think it would pay us both to go partners in it.'

'I dare say you do, but I don't,' said I, with a laugh ; 'for though you could do me a good deal of injury by letting the cat out of the bag, you would not do yourself a bit of good. And as I have to do all the work——'

'Oh, I'm ready to do my share,' she said eagerly.

'What could you do?' I asked.

She had no plan ready—what woman ever has ?—but she knew where her strength lay, so she pressed my arm again, and said submissively :

'Whatever you think advisable.'

'Could you tell me what goes on in the house at Faulcon-dale?'

'I can tell you everything that is said in Mrs. Bromley's room. That is how I came to hear about Mrs. Norman. After the attack, when she thought she was dying, she made Mr. Valentine give a sacred promise never to reveal to anyone about Mrs. Norman. I can hear everything.'

'Then you can tell me what was the result of Captain Bromley's interview with Mr. Grote this morning, for, of course, he told his mother?'

'Yes ; the lawyer says it will be impossible to obtain a

legal separation. Your evidence does not prove cruelty on Dr. Norman's part, but only necessary severity towards a person of weak mind, and the only other witness they could produce, Dr. Bullen, would damage the case, for he himself was under the impression that Mrs. Norman was losing her reason. And he said that it was Mr. Grote's opinion that Dr. Norman was courting a legal inquiry to justify himself against the charge of cruelty in case his treatment may lead Mrs. Norman to self-destruction.'

'Anything else?'

'Yes; he said that nothing whatever could be done until they knew what attitude Mrs. Norman would take. They must get a written, or at least a verbal, statement from her that she goes in fear of her husband.'

'Good,' said I; 'that's something; for now we know how the next fifty is to be got.'

'How?'

'By putting Mrs. Norman in communication with her friends.'

'But Dr. Norman, I heard yesterday, forbids anyone to enter the house. He says that since Captain Bromley has shown his intention of removing Mrs. Norman from the Moat, all further correspondence between them must cease.'

'Do you think I care for that?' I cried; 'let Dr. Norman do what he pleases, I'll speak to Mrs. Norman under his roof before the end of the week.'

And here my blood was fired by Dr. Norman's observation in passing me:

'You are a blundering, conceited idiot.'

Esther looked at me with admiration, and pressing a little closer to my shoulder, said, in her pretty, coaxing manner:

'You see, I can do something.'

'Yes,' said I, well warmed up, 'and if you only do as I tell you you shall share all I make out of this job—henceforth.'

Indeed, I began to feel sincere admiration for this handsome girl, especially when I discovered the means by which she overheard what passed in Mrs. Bromley's room.

Esther's room was directly above Mrs. Bromley's. At one time there had been a gasalier hanging from a medallion in the centre of Mrs. Bromley's chamber. She objected to gas, and had it taken down. The piping serving the gasalier

passed between the ceiling of the lower room and the floor of the upper. To cut off the gas a short length of floor-board in Esther's room had been taken up. This had never been properly secured. And one day Esther, raising it with a pair of scissors, discovered the brass fitting into which the gas-alier had been screwed stopped with a cork. Taking the cork out and bending down, she heard distinctly the voices of Mrs. Bromley and her son. Since then she had repeated the experiment many times, and to her great advantage, as was now proved.

We parted in the most amiable manner, agreeing to meet the next evening.

I looked forward to this meeting with real pleasure, not only because Esther was a very nice girl, but because I recognised the importance of her communication and the enormous advantage of her co-operation.

I determined, however, not to let my sentiments overcome my prudence, nor to let her know the real object I had in view. For a secret is never safe in the keeping of the best of women, and I was not yet sure that Esther was even that; my intention was to learn all she knew and keep her under the delusion that my secret and hers were identical. I had already a very strong suspicion of the nature of her secret, though she had not directly avowed it; but I had been careful not to question her upon it, nor to show my curiosity, lest she should find that we had been playing at cross purposes, and that the object of my pursuit had, so far as I could then see, no connection with the fact she had discovered.

How closely the two things were allied I now perceived, and I was struck with astonishment at my own shortsightedness, for it needed but a confirmation of my suspicions with regard to the fact ascertained by her to entirely overthrow my preconceived notions, and necessitate a new departure in accordance with the altered position in which the affair now presented itself.

As I had expected, Esther, in our second interview, thrown entirely off her guard by the belief that I knew the main points of the case, let me know all concerning the promise exacted by Mrs. Bromley from her son with regard to Mrs. Norman; and this confirming my suspicions, I resolved at once to begin the new attack.

'I shall leave London to-morrow,' said I.

'So soon?' said Esther in a tone of tender regret.

'Yes,' said I; 'for though you have shed a new light upon my life, business must be attended to.'

She acquiesced with a sigh, and then in a less romantic key she asked what I proposed to do.

'First of all,' said I, 'Mrs. Norman must be saved.'

'That is very true, for if she were to die we could never make a penny out of our knowledge. And how shall you do that?'

'If we can get a letter from her declaring that she goes in fear of her life, the lawyers may succeed in obtaining a separation. That would answer our purpose exactly. If she refuses to write such a letter, then means must be found to get her away from the Moat.'

'Do you believe that her husband intends to kill her?'

'Not in a direct way; but I'm sure the lawyer was right, and that he is trying to make her destroy herself.'

'Mr. Valentine does not believe that.'

'Why not?'

'He says that the gain is too small for a man with his calculating mind to incur such a risk. While his wife lives he takes interest on her fortune; all he could get at her death would be the principal.'

This made me chuckle, and I said to myself:

'No; a man with Dr. Norman's prudence and foresight would not risk the loss of reputation for a few miserable thousands, but for a quarter of a million! that would be game worth flying at.'

'What are you smiling at?' asked Esther caressingly.

'I was thinking that Dr. Norman doesn't want his wife, and does want a lump sum down most likely,' I replied.

We then agreed to write to each other, she promising to let nothing escape her, and we parted more amiably than before.

CHAPTER XVI.

CONTINUED FROM THE NARRATIVE OF THOMAS CRAIK.

THE next morning I went to the General Post Office, and on inquiry found that Mr. Richard Everleigh still held an appointment there. This was satisfactory; for it was

entirely at variance with the story of his going abroad with his brother told me by Eliza. Following the directions given me, I at length reached the office in that department of which Mr. Everleigh was sub-director. He rose from his desk, and came to the little counter where I stood.

He was a well-dressed gentleman, a little older than Dr. Norman, but not unlike him in certain respects, having a close-cut black beard and a Jewish nose. I looked with some anxiety for some striking characteristic which might distinguish the two gentlemen; I only found it when he talked; he spoke with a lisp. That was enough.

'If you please, sir,' said I, standing with my hat in my hand, 'Professor Schlobach told me to give you his compliments, and ask if you would be good enough to tell me where Ward's, the naturalist's, is?'

'Profethor Thlobach?' he said in perplexity.

'Yes, sir, Professor Schlobach; and Miss Howard sent her compliments likewise.'

'Very good, I'm thure,' said he, smiling. 'But I have not the leatht notion who Mith Howard and Profethor Thlobach are.'

'They live at Faulcondale, sir.'

'And where ith Faulcondale?'

'Close to Beauchamp Moat.'

'I think I've heard of Beauchamp Moat.'

'Dr. Norman's place, sir.'

'I know Dr. Norman, but I have not the leatht acquaintanth with Profethor Thlobach,' said he, and then he put several questions to me; but as I had learnt all I wanted, and was only anxious to get away, I said I must have made a mistake, begged his pardon, and left the office as quickly as I could.

From St. Martin's-le-Grand I went to Westminster, where I called upon Mr. Grote, and asked him if he had any further need of me. On replying that there was no immediate requirement of my services, I told him I was going into the country to see if I could get employment in the neighbourhood of Beauchamp Moat, as I was engaged to a young woman living in that part, and that letters sent to the Post-office, Faulcondale, would find me.

He took down the address, and I left him.

I had just time for a bit of dinner before taking the train to Barstow, where I arrived a little after six in the evening.

There seemed but little chance of my seeing Eliza that day; but my fortune had taken a favourable turn, and as I was sitting down to rest myself, midway between Barstow and Faulcondale, I caught sight of my rustic beauty coming along the road, with a face as red as the poppies in her bonnet, her best skirt tucked up, with nothing but the glazed lining and a dangling pocket to be seen, her cotton gloves on, a big basket on one arm, and in her other hand the large alpaca umbrella without which she never would go out in her Sunday clothes, no matter how clear the sky. She was trudging manfully, with a step as firm as a ploughboy's; her eyes were fixed intently on the distance, and her mouth as usual was well open, her scarlet face was beaded with perspiration, and she looked as if she were walking against time for a wager.

But she was only returning from a day's pleasure, spent with her sister, who lived at Barstow with a drunken husband and nine children. She was a picture of health; but as I compared her with the elegant girl I had left in London, I admit I felt less anxious to possess her affections than I had been. Nevertheless, I gave her a good sounding kiss, which she returned with apparently a great deal of satisfaction.

We trudged along, chatting upon one thing and another, for some time, and then, as if in fun, I assumed a lisp like Mr. Everleigh's, which so tickled the simple girl that she had to set down her basket in the road and hold her sides until her laughter subsided.

'That's how Mr. Everleigh used to talk, isn't it?' I asked.

'Lor', no,' she replied; 'I shouldn't never been able to hold myself straight for laughing at him if he talked like that.'

I tried to get a description of him from her, but her intelligence was not equal to that. However, by putting questions which only required 'Yes' and 'No' for answer, I found that in age and appearance he could not be unlike Dr. Norman, and that was what I wanted to know.

In my own mind there was no longer any doubt about his identity: the evidence seemed to me conclusive that the man calling himself Mr. Everleigh, who had been guardedly paying his addresses to Miss Howard before the accident which made Captain Bromley a constant visitor at the old farm, was none other than Dr. Norman, of Beauchamp Moat.

My theory of the case was this : Dr. Norman had married to get out of difficulties. He was tired of his wife. But he had not lost his taste for female society. That was shown by letters and photographs I found amongst his private papers, and his occasional visits to London. He had seen Miss Howard on his way to Barstow, probably, and, struck by her beauty, had argued that he might just as well amuse himself at Faulcondale as at London. Circumstances favoured the enterprise.

He was absolutely unknown. He had never been seen in the Moat or out of it by anyone nearer than Barstow, ten miles off, and they were ignorant of his name and residence by reason of Martha being deaf and dumb. He might have passed through Faulcondale in the hooded gig for a dozen years without being recognised. He had found out Miss Howard's name, and the hobby of her guardian. His scientific knowledge was sufficiently extended to enable him to assume the character of a naturalist, in which character he had introduced himself, taking the name of a friend to whom he bore some personal resemblance as a further safeguard against discovery. Forced to retire by the approach of Captain Bromley, he had purloined the letter for future use, and then, to avert suspicion from an inquiry into Mr. Everleigh's relations threatened by my letter to Professor Schlobach, he had taken the bold step (which I now could not too much admire) of bringing me into close communication with himself and adroitly throwing suspicion upon Captain Bromley. He had watched me more narrowly than I had suspected, and anticipating my search for the letter, had concealed the envelope where I should be sure to find it, but where it might have lain for years without being discovered by Captain Bromley. The contents of that envelope had never gone out of his possession. But to use that letter it was necessary to get Captain Bromley out of the way certainly, and his wife also, unless he jeopardized his future by committing bigamy. He had hoped that, by throwing Mrs. Norman and Captain Bromley together, an elopement might ensue, which would effectually prevent further intercourse between Captain Bromley and Miss Howard, and at the same time enable him to get a divorce, which would make his marriage with the young heiress legal. That plan had been frustrated, and he now sought,

as Mr. Grote suggested, to drive his wife to self-destruction. It was reasonable to conjecture that in the inquiry which would follow her death, he would contrive to bring into evidence his wife's relations with Captain Bromley, throwing such reflections on his character as would estrange him from Miss Howard, and leave her once more open to receive his own addresses.

This was my theory, and the closer I examined it the more convinced I became that it was a true one.

There was no time to lose. It was a race between love and death, and the stake was Miss Howard's hand and a quarter of a million of money. Who would win? Not Dr. Norman if I could help it.

I was impatient to begin, but, knowing now the character of the man with whom I had to contend, I saw the necessity of being prudent. I did not want him to know that I had changed my tactics. I wished him to retain the impression that I was a 'blundering idiot' for the present. The knowledge of my presence in that neighbourhood would have aroused his suspicions, but I felt that I was tolerably safe at the ale-house at Faulcondale, where I took up my quarters. For neither he nor Martha held any communication with the people outside the Moat. Day after day I stayed within doors, watching the road from the window of my room, in the hope that I should see the hooded gig pass in the direction of Barstow.

On the third day I found a letter at the post-office: it was from Esther Norton. She wrote very nicely and in a most agreeable tone, but the most important part of her communication was the copy of a letter received by Mrs. Bromley from Mrs. Norman. Esther had underlined these passages:

'How ungrateful and heartless must I seem to you, who have ever been so considerate and indulgent to me! And at this time, too, when I should endeavour to comfort you and lessen your sufferings. I do not know how to excuse myself—indeed, now that I am calm, my past actions seem utterly inexcusable. I can only plead that I was not master of my actions, and a slave to the terrors of my own imagination. I am sure my husband's treatment has been regulated solely by a consideration for my welfare, and that the seclusion in which he has thought fit to keep me

was necessitated by my mad suspicions and wicked caprices. I see that all, now my mind is growing healthier. I shall try to atone for my faults to him and to you by doing my duty, and abiding by the rules which may prevent a return of my disorder.'

Miss Norton concluded her letter with these words :

'Tell me, dear Mr. Peters, what you think of the enclosed letter.'

I told her when I replied what I firmly believed, that the letter would never have been suffered to go to the post if it had been written in other terms, and Mrs. Norman, knowing that, had adopted the only means left her of trying to relieve her friends' minds of the anxiety her fate must have created.

'But,' I added, 'I will soon ascertain the truth. In the meantime, my dear Miss Norton, use all your endeavours to promote a speedy marriage between Captain Bromley and Miss Howard. The reasons for making this urgently necessary I will hereafter explain.'

Two days later I received another letter from Esther, in which she said :

'I cannot imagine why the marriage of Miss Howard with Captain Bromley is so important to our interests ; but I have so much confidence in you, dear Mr. Peters, that I shall do my utmost in that direction.

'I have no doubt I shall be able to do something, for Mrs. Bromley is a little better, and very easily managed, and I have many opportunities of talking to her. I shall hint that Captain Bromley seems low-spirited, and that it would be a good thing if he were to marry, so that his wife might live in the same house to be a comfort to him, and keep the servants, especially the cook, in order, who take advantage of their mistress's illness to turn the house upside down, neglect their duties, etc.'

This letter was very encouraging, and I congratulated myself on having made such a valuable ally ; but my forced inaction was growing intolerable, and on the fifth day I resolved that I must abandon the hope of Dr. Norman leaving the Moat, and run the risk of being discovered by him in my attack.

I had already considered how that attack was to be made. The first means that presented itself was to communicate with Mrs. Norman through Martha, but that course was very difficult, and very dangerous as well. I could not approach the Moat by day, for fear of being seen by the doctor; and Martha being deaf and dumb, it would be next to impossible to attract her attention by night, or to make her understand what I wanted if I could. Then I was not sure of Martha's co-operation, for, although I had kept on good terms with her, I had never thought it worth while to make love to her—an omission for which I now reproached myself. The girl, like most deaf-mutes, was extremely obstinate in her persuasions; I was aware that she had an unbounded esteem for Dr. Norman, and I was not so sure of her respect for me. If Dr. Norman had been sufficiently wise to direct her suspicions against me, I knew that any attempt on my part to win her help would only provoke her obstruction.

The only alternative was to make a direct communication with Mrs. Norman; and this course I resolved to take.

I paid my score, and left the ale-house in the evening; it was dark by the time I got near the Moat. I slept in the pine-woods until the chill air woke me, then I walked about waiting for dawn.

I made my way to the Moat while it was yet too dark to distinguish anything but the outline of the house. But I knew the ground, and, skirting the ditch, I came to the wicket on the bridge. As I put my hand on the latch to see if it were fastened—rather from curiosity than from any practical good its being open might afford me—I heard a short, sharp growl, the rattle of a chain under the gateway, and then the furious barking of a dog, who threw his paws upon the gate as I withdrew my hands, nearly scaring me out of my wits. Happily his chain would not permit him to go farther, so I got off cheaply. But it reminded me once more of the caution I needed to employ in coping with a man of such foresight as Dr. Norman. I retreated into the wood, and waited there for the best part of an hour, when a faint gray light from the clouded sky threw the branches out in relief. The dog had not ceased to bark at lengthening intervals, but this was reassuring, for either he would have barked more furiously had anyone come

down to the gateway, or stopped barking had he been set free. And as he did neither the one nor the other, it was a fair sign that Dr. Norman disregarded the commotion. Still, it was not without fear that I again drew near the house. I approached it this time on the north side. There were no windows on the outer side of the laboratory except the two round ones over the shelf of bottles—none from which I could be seen unless an observer were posted at the one which opened into my old sleeping-room. It was this latter window which now concerned me. I had made my exit and entrance by it once, and I wished to see if it might not be done again.

The piece of timber which had served me in place of a ladder was gone from the ditch, and for this and other reasons I gave up that side of the building as impracticable. I had more hope of getting in on the east side—that part of the house which had been abandoned—and standing on the outer edge of the moat, I scanned the building to find the safest means.

The walls sprang from the bottom of the moat, the upper story overhanging. An enormous growth of ivy covered the whole side, and mounted the naked timbers of the roof, the main stems lying against the wall like ropes as thick as a man's arm. The sashes were gone from the casements in the upper story. On the lower story there were four windows, all furnished with iron bars. On a level with the opposite edge of the moat was a door: at one time there had been a wooden bridge across the ditch; the crumbling brickwork that supported it was all that remained. The simplest way of getting in seemed to climb by the ivy, but I knew enough of that brittle and treacherous growth to reject this notion. Then it looked tolerably easy to throw a line, with a stout hook at the end, into one of the upper windows; but supposing the hook caught all right upon the sill, there was the risk of the rotten wood giving way as soon as my weight told on it. The windows on the lower floor, being ten feet from the bottom of the moat, and barred as well, were almost as impracticable as the window of my old sleeping-room. After all, the door most took my fancy, for the brickwork of the bridge was only a little below the lintel, and afforded a standing-place where one might get at the lock; so I slipped into the ditch, scrambled up on

the brickwork, and gently tried the door. To my disgust, I found it was secured, not by a lock which might be picked, but by bolts on the inside top and bottom, which there was no getting at. I once more explored the whole side of the building, and finally came to the conclusion that I must try the upper windows, and trust to my luck and the firmness of the sill to get into the house and not break my bones in the attempt.

The light was now strong enough to reveal objects at a dozen yards distinctly. Comparing one window with the other, I settled which was the most reliable, calculated the length of cord I should require, and the size of hook; then I went up into the wood, and walked off to Lipley. There, after I had breakfasted, I found a smith, who forged me a three-pronged hook like a grappling-iron, with an eye in the haft. Then I bought fifteen yards of stout cord, half-a-quarter loaf, a piece of cheese, and a couple of bottles of ale, a pair of pincers, and a small hand fret-saw, a dark lantern, a gimlet, and a second-hand carpet-bag, into which I contrived to pack all my other purchases. I slept in the afternoon, and left Lipley when it was getting dusk; it was dark when I neared Beauchamp Moat. I kept clear of the front of the house, and came down through the woods upon the north side. A faint light, gleaming from the two round windows of the laboratory, showed me that Dr. Norman was there. I went up into the wood, lit my lantern, and, setting it on the ground facing me, pulled out my hook and cord, and amused myself for a good hour in attaching the one to the other securely, and tying double knots in the cord at intervals of a foot from end to end. This done, I put the apparatus back into the bag, blew out the light, and once more reconnoitred the house.

The light was gone from the laboratory. Keeping at a good distance and stepping lightly, I ventured to the front, and seeing no light either in the sitting-room or the kitchen windows, I concluded that the household had retired for the night. But I lingered in the woods for another hour before setting to work.

The clouds which had overhung the sky for the last two days had broken up that evening, and now, from time to time, I got a glimpse of the new moon. It was not full enough to give perceptible light, but it rendered the night

less dark than I had found it before; so that standing on the edge of the moat I could see clearly enough the dark openings of the upper windows. I had approached stealthily, and the watch-dog was quiet.

I got out my grapnel, coiled the rope, and then, after balancing it carefully in my hand, flung up the hook, which, by good fortune, fell fairly inside of the window, and dropped with a thud upon the floor. I pulled it gently until it resisted my efforts, and this part of the business being done satisfactorily, I put the lantern in my pocket and slipped into the ditch.

The cord was more than sufficiently long. I gave it a strong, steady pull to test its security, and then set myself to climb up hand over hand.

As the upper story overhung the lower by a couple of feet, I no sooner got off the ground than I began to turn round and round like a joint on a meat-jack. However, this was but a trifle, though it caused me to strike my head violently against a projecting beam, and I felt that I had reason to be thankful when at length I got my arms over the window-sill and drew myself up into a position of comparative safety. The ceiling was down, and I could see the stars through the gap in the roof above. I lit my lantern before leaving the sill, for I feared that the floor, rotten with exposure and age, would yield under my feet; and well it was that I did so, for the boards were no firmer than brown paper, and I fancied that the joists bent under me as I carefully made my way along from one to the other. I got down the rotten stairs without serious accident, and, finding the door, drew back the rusty bolts and opened it; then I jumped down into the ditch, fetched my carpet-bag from the other side, and getting into the house again, closed the door and felt rather proud of having achieved not the least hazardous part of my enterprise.

I had to make a journey upstairs for the rope I had left hanging from the window; but that done, I resolved to go out and pass the rest of the night in the wood, for there was not a dry place to sit down upon within the house; and the darkness, made more weird by the shaft of light from my lantern, together with the smell of mouldering wood, the moist and clammy atmosphere, the slimy growth upon the floor, and the silence, filled me with terror of I know

not what, unless it was of the whole structure falling upon me and burying me alive.

I put my bag in a corner, opened the door, blew out my light, and, slipping into the ditch, felt as if I had escaped from a tomb.

I dozed under the pines until daybreak, when I returned to the house, and bolting the door behind me, set about exploring the ground floor as well as I could by the faint light that came through the ivy-hung windows. One of these looked on to the courtyard, and it was strange to look at the familiar wings from this new point of view. Directly in front of me was the gateway, and there I saw the newly placed dog-kennel. All the rest was as I had left it. Martha was not yet down. Everything was perfectly still and motionless.

One end of the ruined wing abutted upon the laboratory and my old sleeping-room, from which it was separated by its own walls and doors and a stout partition of weatherboarding. The other end adjoined the wing devoted to stabling and coach-houses, with disused store-rooms and hay-lofts above. Here also the encroachment of decay had been arrested by strong carpentering. I knew the stables and lofts well, and the ways of communication between the coach-house and the kitchen in the south wing. And it was by this side that I meant to get to Mrs. Norman, for the reason that whatever work was necessary to make an entry through the partition which cut off the ruined wing could be done without attracting attention, since the stables were only visited by Martha when the horse was to be fed or taken out, and it was too far removed from the habited part to reach even Dr. Norman's sharp ear.

For further security I resolved to attack the partition upon the upper floor, where the corridor abutted upon a room above the stable, which, during my service with Dr. Norman, had been used as a straw-loft, and was visited by no one except when a fresh bundle of straw was wanted.

I made a hearty breakfast of bread and cheese and beer, and then set to work. Driving my gimlet through the weather-boards in three places, I had the satisfaction of finding straw beyond.

I examined the woodwork, and finding that I must cut the boards to get through, I chose the bottom two, and

having made a hole with a gimlet and my pocket-knife, I got the end of my fret-saw in and began to cut, working slowly, and leaving off from time to time to listen and cast my eye round the court. Once I saw Martha come out by the door opening from the kitchen to shake the crumbs from a tablecloth, and go back again. Later on I saw Mrs. Norman.

She was haggard and weary-looking, and sank into a seat as if she had not strength to go farther. I had never seen her so carelessly and unbecomingly dressed. She had brought a book with her, but it lay unopened in her lap from the time she came out until she went in again; she sat with her chin on her breast in an attitude of dejection, which nothing altered. She sat so motionless that some sparrows came down to take the crumbs Martha had thrown out: I thought she would cry to see them so blithe and free, but she was unmoved. When Martha came out and signed that lunch was served, she rose and followed her into the house through the kitchen. The reason of her going that way, which perplexed me at first, I discovered later on. The ill-conditioned and ferocious dog under the gateway sprang out of his kennel and strained at his collar to get at those within as well as those without. Only when Dr. Norman approached, the beast hung his head and slunk terror-stricken into his kennel: yet he alone it was who fed the dog.

CHAPTER XVII.

FROM THE NARRATIVE OF DOROTHEA HOWARD.

I HAVE noticed that though I frequently used the whip to Coquelicot, whose stubborn perversity was at times most exasperating, I could never tolerate his punishment by anyone else; indeed, I sometimes lost my temper when my guardian, who is surely the most merciful of men, used the whip to overcome the animal's caprices, although, in his place, I should have been ten times more severe. And this inconsistent humour governed my disposition in more serious matters. Thus, after lying awake tormenting myself with the most unreasonable doubts of Valentine's con-

stancy—doubts unjust in themselves and shameful for me to entertain—I no sooner heard him charged with having gone to Beauchamp Moat to see Mrs. Norman than my spirit rose in indignant protest against an accusation which attributed falsehood to my lover.

But now that I come to examine my feelings closely, I perceive that a very great difference existed between the charges made against Valentine by others, and those which owed their origin to my own jealous imagination. For whilst every imputation put upon him by the mysterious 'X.' and now by Peters related to events taking place since the time of our becoming acquainted, those with which I tormented myself referred entirely to a previous date. To be plain, I was haunted with the jealous fear that at one time he had loved Mrs. Norman more dearly than he now loved me.

This, I own, showed great weakness of character, but I wish it to be understood that my character was most faulty in this respect; for unless some concession is made to me for imperfections which it was beyond my power to correct, I cannot hope to be forgiven for the crime to which they led me.

One good effect of the story told by Peters was, then, to dispel my idler vapourings and excite a generous sentiment, under which I felt I could defend my lover against his enemies though all the world slandered him. And so I am happy to say I had nothing but joyful love to offer him when we met, with no reserved thought or evil suspicion to shake the steadiness of my gaze as we looked into each other's eyes. But how selfish and unsympathetic must I have been to add to his anxieties at a time when he needed relief!

I could see that he took his mother's sufferings and the misfortunes of Mrs. Norman deeply to heart; for he was not like some people I have known, who could change their moods as readily as their dresses to suit the company they were in; he was too steadfast and sincere for that, and it was not necessary for him to be in the presence of those he loved to share their joys and sorrows. Under these anxieties he was naturally quieter and more grave than in the earlier time; but I loved him none the less for that; and his troubles in no way lessened his love for me, but were rather the cause of his loving me more; for, in trying to be an aid

and a solace to him, the better faculties of my nature were brought into play. It was a great happiness to me to find how useful I was to him in this way, and how much easier and lighter his heart became when he had told me all that was on his mind, and heard all that I had to say in reply.

‘There is no one in all the world like you, love, for smoothing out the wrinkles of care,’ said he one day.

This made me wish more than ever to be near him; and it distressed me to think that he was oppressed with care of which I might be able to relieve him in some measure, and yet could not for the distance that lay between us.

This unhappiness, however, was but of short duration, for in the first week of September Valentine brought the joyful news that his mother was much better, though still unable to move without assistance, and that she wished to see me.

‘I will go back with you, dear,’ I said eagerly.

‘I start to-morrow morning,’ said he, ‘and I fear you will scarcely have done all you have to do by that time.’

‘Why, what have I to do?’

‘Pack up all your marvellous dresses, for I have found a particular charm in each, and I would have my mother see them all.’

‘They shall be packed. What else?’

‘There is your guardian’s consent to be got.’

I laughed at the idea of his objecting—that dear old friend, whose sole object seemed to be the gratification of my wishes.

‘And he must be induced to forsake his studies for awhile, and come with us,’ said Valentine.

‘All that can be done before tea. And what have I to do all the rest of the time?’

‘The hardest task of all, perhaps,’ he replied. ‘Bid good-bye to Faulcondale, for I don’t think I can let you come back again, darling.’

As I thought of bidding good-bye to Coquelicot and my pigeons, and the house where I had lived so long and found such happiness, the tears started to my eyes; but when I thought of Valentine and his love for me, I was ashamed that he should see my weakness, and, brushing away my tears, I threw myself in his arms, and wound mine round his dear neck, glad to give up everything for him.

But for all that I had a good cry when I had given

Coquelicot his supper for the last time, and the poor beast, as if conscious of what was to happen, pricked his ears, looked round, and whinnied as I turned to leave.

My guardian made light of the preparations for departure, although I knew that he was engaged the greater part of the night in making them, and the next morning we three left Faulcondale.

I remember nothing distinctly between that time and the day of my marriage—all is like the memory of a dream at this distance—a dream of which I retain the sweet impression, and recollect some detached incidents now difficult to chain together and put in their proper sequence. This confusion in my mind can be understood, for to the time of my leaving home my life had been so regular and quiet that the events, separated by long intervals, stand out prominently, and the transition of this slow-moving pace to the whirl and bustle of my existence in London, where so many events were crowded into a small space of time, was bewildering in the extreme. Happily, I made notes every night of the day's doings, and from these I can extract the bare facts necessary to continue the narrative of events during this period.

'We arrived here (Fairlawn, Wimbledon), this morning (Sept. 5), where we are to stay as Mrs. Bromley's visitors, until my guardian has found suitable apartments.

'Mrs. Bromley is very handsome still, though the face is marked with suffering. Her eyebrows are quite dark, though her hair is silvery white. She is very weak and emotional. Illness may have enfeebled her intellect, but it has not touched her heart. She shows an intense love for dear Valentine—who, indeed, that knows him would not love him intensely?—and a strong liking for me also, which must be due to Valentine's love of me, the highest praise he can bestow.

'She looked at me earnestly as she held my hand, and then, turning to Valentine, she smiled as if in approval of his choice. She speaks with difficulty, being unable to raise her face from the pillow, but she said to my guardian, when he was presented, "I think we may congratulate our children on their choice," and my guardian replied with gentle emphasis, "I am sure of it—quite sure."

‘I was astonished by the elegance and luxury in all the appointments of the house, and the number of servants, and the sumptuous dinner; and I wondered how Valentine had found anything to admire, as he did, in our plain house at Faulcondale and the simple fare we had to offer; how, indeed, after such luxury at home, he had been able to make himself tolerably comfortable with us. But he is easy under all conditions, I think: it is his nature. I have a lovely room, and Norton, a tall, handsome young woman, who waits upon Mrs. Bromley, also attends to my wants, dressing my hair before dinner, and when I come up to bed. I was placed at the head of the dinner-table opposite Valentine, and there were two servants to wait upon us. I own, many of the ways are strange to me; this, with the attentions of the servants, somewhat confused me at first; but I felt that for Valentine’s sake I must not let this appear, and so I employed all my tact to avoid committing any great solecism, and bore myself with the dignity which I felt should characterize my behaviour as the future wife of Valentine. But I had to employ no art to this end, for I felt I was no longer a rustic, and a thrill of pride ran through my nerves and seemed to brace me up as I reflected that in a little time I shall be mistress of such a house and equipage as this.

‘My guardian is so simple and indifferent to mere worldly considerations that he felt no constraint at all in these new surroundings. He was jocular with the stiff and formal servants, just as he is with Eliza at home, helped himself at table, and laughed for ten minutes over the mistake he made in drinking a good gulp of rose-water which was brought in bowls for our fingers.

* * * * *

‘This morning when Norton came in to dress my hair—I noticed that Valentine admired it at dinner yesterday—she said:

“If you please, Miss Howard, cook wishes to know what shall be prepared for dinner.”

“Mrs. Bromley or Captain Bromley is the proper person to ask about that,” I replied.

“Captain Bromley always leaves it to the cook, miss, but Mrs. Bromley begs that you will give her instructions, as she is careless and unsatisfactory in her arrangements.”

‘This naturally surprised me greatly and embarrassed me also, for I had no more notion of ordering such a dinner as we had yesterday than of driving a locomotive. However, I concealed my ignorance, and told Norton the cook should have her orders after breakfast. And then I taxed my invention for a bill of fare that would not render me ridiculous nor give Mrs. Bromley an unpleasant impression of my abilities. By good fortune I remembered that I had seen a *menu* in a copy of the *Figaro* which my guardian had given me from his store of old journals to envelop some trifles I wished to pack separately in my box. So when I was alone I got the journal and wrote on a piece of paper this my first *menu* :

‘Potage à la Julienne.	Gâteau au riz.
Turbot mayonnaise.	Dinde rotie.
Bœuf à la Hollandaise.	Cresson salade.
Rognons de veau sautés.	Baba au rhum.
Flageollets au beurre.	Biscuits vanilles.
Café.	Liqueurs.

‘Norton’s eyes, which are rather wicked, though very pretty, twinkled maliciously, I thought, as she took this paper from me. Valentine tells me that all the servants dislike Norton, so I fancy she saw the difficulty the cook would have in providing all I had set down, and her mortification in not being able to cook just whatever she pleased. But I think it has established my reputation in the kitchen, and that the servants are even more respectful and attentive now than they were yesterday.

‘While on this subject I may mention that the dinner gave Valentine surprise and satisfaction, and when we were alone I told him what had happened ; he laughed heartily, said I was born to rule, and made a great deal of this little incident.

‘Norton has been of great service to me. She is very discreet. She does not presume upon my ignorance of society manners, which she must perceive, but adroitly makes suggestions which save me from perplexity and mistake. Thus, when we were about to go for a drive before dinner, she asked if she should lay out my dark dress, whether I should prefer my bonnet to my large hat, and in which box she should find a pair of light gloves, thus

preventing me from putting on things which might have made me unpleasantly conspicuous. We had a delightful drive through the Park, Valentine very kindly wearing a light suit to render the airy costume of my dear old guardian less noticeable. There were many, many carriages—so many that I could hardly think Valentine spoke seriously when he said that nearly everyone was out of town—and many beautiful women in elegant dresses, and handsome gentlemen, though none so handsome as Valentine. The gentlemen stared very much at me; but I could see that they admired me, and I was glad of that for my dear Valentine's sake. The ladies, too, looked at me curiously; indeed, it was only the people who were quite young or quite old who seemed more interested in the professor, and these his wig or his brilliant scarf, or his straw hat, amused considerably. However, he was as much amused as they, so it made no difference to his pleasure.

‘I shall be glad when I can dress as richly as any lady we met to-day, and I hope the wish is not the mere outcome of vanity—though I own to a feeling of exultation in the prospect of being foremost amongst the best women of society—but due, in some measure, to a proper desire to be worthy, in *every* respect, of my husband.

‘After going through the Park, we went as far as Charing Cross, and near there a man stood in the street selling French newspapers; Valentine bought a *Figaro* and handed it to me with the utmost gravity, and we both laughed. But I am glad to have the paper, otherwise I know not what I should do for to-morrow's *menu*.

‘After dinner I sat with Mrs. Bromley alone, Valentine having gone out with my guardian to hear music.

‘She was pleased to listen to my gossip, and held my hand in hers for a long while. She wanted to talk, though she could only do so with painful difficulty. She said:

‘“If you knew how much I owe you, dear! If you knew how happy you have made me! I was miserable till you came. Shall I tell you why? My son was unhappy. He could not rest. He tried to hide his impatience from me. But his heart ached to be with you. I was not jealous of his love for you. It is too late for that. But I could not bear to part with him before the time came for the last parting. And he saw this and stayed with me.

But it was terrible to think that he was waiting with impatience for release—that he might quit the dead for the living love.”

‘This made me explain that she wronged Valentine to think that of him.

“‘I did not wish to think it. He would not willingly shorten my life. But the stronger yearning to be with you existed, though he would deny its existence to himself.”

‘I asked her why she should think so.

“‘Norton told me,” she replied. “She told me how he paced the room when he was alone—how he tried to read and could not fix his attention—how dull and dispirited he was. Do not be vexed with her. She has more than atoned for the pain she gave me by the joy she has given me since. I know that Valentine is happy now.”

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‘I asked my guardian this morning if he could give me a good deal of money.

“‘I will give you all I have,” he said, and he gave me a cheque-book later in the morning, after he had been for a walk, and told me I could write orders for as much money as ever I needed. In the afternoon I took Norton with me, and we went to some beautiful shops, and I was measured for three dresses, and bought so many things that I nearly forgot how time flies in this occupation; however, I returned to Wimbledon just in time to dress for dinner. After dinner Valentine took me to hear an opera; it was the first time I had been in a theatre. I cannot attempt to discuss what I saw and heard. Why should I? I am not likely to forget it, nor the happiness of the drive afterwards to Wimbledon in a hansom with my dear Valentine. Oh! I am too happy to write more to-night. I want to lie down and think and dream it all over again.

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‘Mrs. Bromley’s affection increases. Already she calls me her daughter. Nothing can exceed her fondness—except Valentine’s, which is not the same. She told me to-day that I had brought order, as well as happiness, into the house. That before my coming the servants had been uncontrollable—the only dependable one being Norton, who, of course, could not control her fellow-servants; the house had been neglected, waste and extravagance prevailed, poor

Valentine had been badly served, and his life made intolerable by the endless quarrels and disputes between the riotous servants (though he never said anything about it to his mother, or would allow that he was made uncomfortable), and she herself had been subjected to insolent messages sent up by Norton from downstairs. Now all this is altered. The servants recognise me as mistress of the house, are impressed by my dignity and ability, etc., etc. I am almost ashamed to write the flattering things she said of me. I am glad if all is true. Norton, of course, is the chief source of Mrs. Bromley's intelligence; but Valentine sees good in all that I do, and I believe talks about me to his mother in my absence, though it is not in his nature to flatter anyone.

'I cannot tell why Norton should be so devoted to my interests as this shows her to be; perhaps she sees that it pleases Mrs. Bromley to hear praise of me, and has a wish to ingratiate herself in my favour. I do not think she is disinterested. Her eyes are too sly and furtive.

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'My dresses came home to-day, and fit beautifully. I am charmed with them. I went down to dinner in my new favourite. Valentine insisted upon taking me to his mother before we sat down; his eyes sparkled with admiration. He is more passionate than he was—and I too perhaps. For some time I could not write after our parting. The sound of his deep voice upon the stairs made me catch my breath and tremble. But it is strange that a man with some contempt for what he calls the conventionalities of society should yet be influenced by a woman's dress. My new robe pleased me; but I am sure it excited his love for me to a higher pitch. I suppose this is natural to all men, or women would not spend so much time on this manner of pleasing them.

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'There has not been one visitor here since our arrival. Valentine goes out occasionally to see his friends at the club, but none come here, and Mrs. Bromley sees no one. She explained this curious fact to-night. During her husband's life they lived on Mr. Bromley's estate in the Midlands. The country was insupportably dull to Mrs. Bromley when he died, and she came to London and lived in May-

fair. There Edith's beauty procured many admirers, and they had a large circle of acquaintances, but Mrs. Bromley formed no new friendships.

"It seemed to me as if my heart had been buried with my husband," she said. "I could never love anyone but my son and poor Edith. When my son went to Egypt, and Edith married and went to live at Wimbledon, where Norman was trying to establish a practice, the young people forsook me altogether, and I had not even an acquaintance. Then I came here to live, that I might be near Edith. But her troubles had begun, and for her sake I declined to make acquaintance with the people in the neighbourhood. For my unhappy foster-child was humiliated by her husband's harsh treatment, and she felt degraded from her former place in society. She feared to meet anyone who had known her when she was a triumphant beauty, and so you understand how it comes about that I know not a single soul to call my friend—except you, my dear."

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"My guardian told me this afternoon that he had seen apartments in Bloomsbury that will suit me, he thinks. He says, and I agree with him, that we were asked to stay here while he looked about for a temporary home, and that although there is no falling off in the kindness of Mrs. Bromley, but rather the reverse, we must not presume unduly upon her hospitality. To-morrow we go together to see the rooms; but I know not how Valentine will accept this arrangement. For every day we seem drawn closer and closer together, and when we are not together we seek pretexts for meetings, and he is never out of my thoughts. Our love is now an enthralling passion, and I cannot think of this new arrangement, which must part us for many hours during the day, without a sinking heart.

"He has changed greatly, from my point of view, since the early days of our love. He is more expansive, more joyous, more passionate. This is but natural, for we are constantly together, and every word and movement seems to excite some further development of our love. And then in those early days he was troubled about his mother's health and Edith's position. But now Mrs. Bromley's condition is less critical; for though she can never recover and a second shock would be fatal, the physician declares that she may

live for many months. And Edith's position seems better, if one can so describe a position that must be always bad. She has written a letter declaring that she was under the influence of mental delusion when she attributed murderous intentions to her husband, that he exercised no more severity than her disorder required, and that she believes by submitting patiently to his treatment she shall ultimately arrive at a condition which will restore happiness to herself and her husband. In the face of this it is impossible, the lawyer says, to obtain a separation, even if it were thought advisable. Valentine persuades his mother to believe Edith's letter, and he tells me that he himself believes that there is truth in what she says. He argues that Dr. Norman must be himself mad if his actions are not prompted by the motive he claims for them. For Valentine made him an offer of a sum larger than that he would derive from the death of his wife if he would agree to a separation, and he refused it; which he would not have done, surely, if the only motive one can attribute to his cruelty was to drive his poor wife to self-destruction.

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'When I told Valentine that I was going with my guardian to see the apartments he proposes taking for us, he held me by the two arms and said passionately:

"Doris, you shall never leave this house for a single night except as my wife."

'Faltering, I began to tell him that we had accepted his hospitality temporarily, but he would not hear me out.

"What we said then and what we do now are not the same," said he. "Then I managed to live a week at a time without you; now the night is too long, though you live under the same roof. These hands are not more necessary to me than the dear body that they clasp"—he had dropped my arms and drawn me to his breast. "I can do nothing without you. I could not eat if you were not at the table, nor sleep unless I knew that you were within hearing of my call—I don't think I could breathe the air that is not perfumed with your breath—such a sybarite have you made me."

'He made me sit, and putting a book in my hand, left me. I heard him go upstairs. When he came down he said that his mother wanted to see me. Norton left Mrs. Bromley's room as I entered it.

““ My dear child,” said Mrs. Bromley, with agitation, “ Valentine tells me that you meditate going away upon some feeling of etiquette or propriety, and I see that you are right. Your position here is anomalous and unsatisfactory. You are something more than a guest, yet something less than a member of the family. My love, be more than either; be mistress here. I can never hope to leave this room alive, and all that I have must be yours and Valentine’s when I am no more. It is my dearest wish that you should be my son’s wife; give me the delight of seeing my wish fulfilled. I know that the conditions are not those that a young bride holds dear. At such a season you will hardly like to make the ceremony brilliant, nor to stay long away from me afterwards; yet a quiet wedding and a brief wedding-trip, though prosy and unromantic, may still be attended with great happiness.”

‘ I needed no arguments of this kind, for though not particularly wise, I was not so foolish as to set great store by ceremonies of an ostentatious kind, and I wanted not to hear persuasions that implied a want of feeling as well as want of sense in my disposition.

‘ I told Valentine this, and said I would be his wife when he would.

* * * * *

‘ This day Valentine told me that the license will permit him to make me his wife on Tuesday next, the 18th.’

CHAPTER XVIII.

FROM THE NARRATIVE OF THOMAS CRAIK.

THE extreme caution with which I had to use my saw or fear of making a noise that would attract attention, if by chance Dr. Norman should take it into his head to go through the kitchen and coach-house into the stables, and the frequent pauses made for the purpose of observing what passed in the courtyard, made my operation very tedious. I had forgotten to provide myself with grease for my saw, and cheese was an indifferent substitute; so that, despite all my care, the saw would give an occasional squeak that sent my heart up into my mouth, as the saying is. How-

ever, by two o'clock I had managed to get a two-foot length cut out of one plank, and was well satisfied with my labour. I could see now what I was at, and by pushing the straw on the further side of the partition aside I got full play for my saw.

But before recommencing I opened my second bottle of beer, picking the cork out with my gimlet and pocket-knife, and satisfied my hunger with bread and cheese. During this repast I stood by the ivy-covered window and kept my eye on the court. Mrs. Norman had again come from the house and taken her seat. There she sat for a long time, watching the clouds as they slowly crept along the sky. In after days, when I was unable to move from my bed, and had no amusement but to watch the clouds freely moving over the beautiful heavens, and changing every moment from one pretty form to another, it gave me a notion of liberty and happiness that made my captivity and the monotony of forced stillness wonderfully sad, and nothing else.

The dog having barked himself into exhaustion at the poor lady, lay down in the sun and watched her. I heard the clatter of Martha's plates as she washed them in the kitchen, and I had no doubt that Dr. Norman was back in his laboratory. I set to work again, and by the time light began to fade I got the second length cut out, leaving a hole at the bottom of the partition two feet long by about seventeen inches deep—ample room for me to pass my body through. I could do no more that day, so I waited as patiently as I could for nightfall, making my plans, and setting down on a piece of paper the things I stood in need of—such as screws, a screwdriver, a note-book, and, above all, more beer than I had bought for this day's consumption.

The moment I saw a light glimmering through the green blinds of the laboratory, signifying that Dr. Norman was there, I descended to the ground floor, set my lantern where I could lay my hand on it readily, opened the door, slipped into the moat, shut the door carefully, and then, with my empty carpet-bag, got off as stealthily and as quickly as possible into the wood, where alone I felt perfectly safe.

I reached Lipleigh, happily, before all the shops were closed, bought all that I wanted, enjoyed a pleasant half-hour in the alehouse discussing the latest murder, and then

returned to the Moat house. I got in without any accident, fastened the door, lit my dark lantern, and went to the upper story, where I found everything as I had left it. Light still glimmered through the green blinds, and there was a dim glow in a window of the wing opposite to me. I watched until the light disappeared in the laboratory, and another shone from a second window in the upper story opposite. As this light was more brilliant than the other, which yet shone through the white blinds, I concluded that this latter must be a night-light burning in Mrs. Norman's room. This was satisfactory, for, though I knew the house tolerably well, it was necessary that I should be quite certain which was Mrs. Norman's room and which the doctor's, and the night-light showing through the crack round the door would be a sure guide to me.

I had suffered too much by haste before to be in a great hurry now. I wished to make sure of my approaches before entering into the west wing, so I resolved to do no more that night than to make myself comfortable. With this view I now set down my lantern handy, and, lying down full-length, wriggled my way through the hole in the partition into the straw loft. I so arranged the door that it could not be opened, and then I made up a comfortable bed with the straw and composed myself to sleep with the consciousness that I must wake at daybreak.

At daybreak I woke and made my way through the lofts and empty rooms in the south wing to the door opening on to the corridor in the west side. I just opened this door and glanced down the passage, then closed it again and returned to the straw-loft. Here I arranged the straw pretty much as I had found it, leaving a little opening to pass through. Then I wriggled back into the east wing through the hole, and, putting my arm back afterwards, drew the trusses together so as to close up the opening through which I had crawled.

I now set myself to brace together the two lengths of board I had cut out by means of a back-piece fastened to them by screws, and so contrived it that it might be drawn into the opening from the other side of the partition, or placed in it on my side in such a manner as to conceal the work I had been at should the straw be removed. As I gave best part of the day to this—having nothing better to

do—I made a very fair job of it. One more important affair than this was to be done, but that took less time. I had to write to Mrs. Norman.

After a good deal of thinking, I wrote these words in my note-book, tearing the page so that it could be taken out the moment it was needed :

‘A friend is here. If you wish to be free for ever, stand by the open window of your sitting-room at nine o’clock to-morrow morning.’

The evening was terribly long, and it seemed as if Dr. Norman intended staying at his studies all the night ; however, it was not much later than eleven when he went to his room. I waited for fully another hour before quitting the east wing, during which time I made what preparations were necessary. Amongst the things I had bought on my last journey to Lipley were a pair of india-rubber goloshes. These I put on. I buttoned my jacket close and lit my lantern. I also unfastened the door below, so that it could be opened from the outside ; for if by chance I should be discovered, it would never do to make my retreat by the way I came, as that would lead to the discovery of my secret entrance, and ruin any second attempt by that way.

A little after twelve I began my business by withdrawing the hopper from the partition ; then, after another glance across the court, to see that no light was moving and none to be seen anywhere but in Mrs. Norman’s room, I lay down and crawled through into the straw-loft. I drew the hopper into its place, and, throwing the light of the lantern upon it, was pleased to see how well it fitted, being perfectly unnoticeable without close examination. I set up the straw in its place, and then with the utmost caution felt my way from point to point through the south wing—feeling it safer to keep my lantern in my pocket until it should be absolutely needed.

My only dread was that the door dividing the passage in the west wing from the south should be fastened, but this precaution had not been taken, and so I presently found myself in the inhabited part of the house, and within a dozen yards or so of Mrs. Norman’s chamber, my heart bumping heavily with excitement. I passed the room where Captain Bromley had slept during his stay, and then

Martha's, and so came to the head of the stairs. Here I paused and listened; the only sound I could hear came from Martha's room: she was no more dumb than other people in her sleep. So far all was well. A few yards more and I should be at Mrs. Norman's door. But I had yet to provide for escape if flight were necessitated. I slipped carefully downstairs, my goloshes being a great comfort to me, entered the sitting-room, and set the window open. All was still outside, and a gentle rain falling.

Leaving the sitting-room door open, I crept upstairs, and once more stood in the corridor. I waited till I felt calm and steady, and then stepped forward. A little streak of light along the floor showed Mrs. Norman's door. I was less than a yard from it when I felt something like a stretched thread touch my shin—it was so slight as not to alarm me, and I made another step forward. Now I was bending down to slip under the door the page torn from my note-book, when, with a creak, I heard a door open further down the passage and the continued jingle of an electric bell. All was dark, and I pulled myself up, feeling that I might yet make my escape in safety; but, as fate would have it, in bending down my lantern had been pressed upward from my pocket, and now, as I straightened myself up, it fell on the floor with a clatter. I saw there was not a moment to spare, and turning about I bolted for the stairs. Just as I got my hand on the banister there was the sharp smack of a pistol, and then another and another, and feeling a smart sting on the back of my leg I knew I had been hit. That gave a little more celerity to my flight, and I got to the foot of the stairs in three steps and a tumble. I dashed through the sitting-room, flung myself into the window, and dropped down into the ditch, whence I got into the wood in less time than I have taken to write about it. There I stopped to get breath and strength—both of which had forsaken me at the same time—contrary to the usual rule; but the cause of this was soon apparent.

I had thought by the feel of it that the shot at most had scratched my skin; but now, feeling my trousers stick cold and clammy to my leg, I knew that it was something more than that. I found that my flesh was torn badly. I bound up my wound as well as I could, and then set out for Lipleigh with the most gruesome feeling; for here was I once

more beaten by Dr. Norman, my note being still in my hand, and nothing for all the pains I had taken but a flesh wound. 'Is he right?' I asked myself. 'Am I a blundering idiot?' This was the despondency of weakness. I fainted twice before I got to Lipley, and then I dared not knock up the ale-house keeper, lest he should take me for a housebreaker.

By the time he opened his house (which was on the outskirts of the village) I could hardly stand, and had not strength to seek a pool of water where I might wash my hands of the blood on them.

To make matters worse, I had smeared my face in putting my hands thoughtlessly to my forehead when I fainted; so altogether I presented a pretty spectacle, and looked for nothing else than to be marched off to the lock-up on suspicion of having done away with somebody. However, come what might, I felt I must have help of some sort, so I staggered up to the landlord as he was taking down his shutters, and laid my hand on his arm.

Turning round and seeing me, he dropped the shutter out of his hand, and for a minute or so stared at me in silence with his mouth agape.

But faintness coming over me again, I staggered forward to lay hold of the door-post for support, when he came to his senses, laid hold of me with his big hands, and helped me into the house.

There I went off, and when I again came to, I was lying on a decent bed with a white ceiling before my eyes.

'What ha' been doing, lad?' asked the landlord, bending over me; 'nicking Squire Ludlow's game?'

I nodded, for he spoke in a sympathetic tone, that showed that he did not regard poaching as a heinous crime.

I thowt so,' he said; 'but it be a mortal shame as these ere c——d keepers should be allowed to fire o' balls at a po'r feller and take their goons also.'

I made up a plausible story about being a novice at the game, and only going through the woods to see whether there was any game about, which he didn't believe, for he gave me credit for being an old hand at it, and liked me all the better for what he considered my cunning in pretending to be so ignorant of poaching.

I told him I could pay for all I had, and if it would be safe to send for a doctor I would like to have one, as I wanted to be on my legs again quickly. But he would not allow of having doctors in the place, who were no better than J.P.'s he declared, said he could do all that was necessary for me, and would set me up in a week. He, however, was not so clever as he thought, or I, as he declared, was more difficult to cure than most folks, and so at the end of the week I was still lying abed watching the clouds and fretting.

By this time my anxiety grew unbearable, for though now my wound was certainly healing, I knew it must be a week at least before I could safely be up and about; and while I was lying there my natural enemy, Dr. Norman, was having it all his own way. It was quite possible that he might succeed in killing his wife, and separating Captain Bromley and Miss Howard before their marriage could be brought about.

I was anxious to hear from Miss Norton, for whom, in these hours of idleness, my feelings grew very tender, so I wrote a letter to Eliza, at Faulcondale, telling her I was ill, and asking her to come and see me, bringing any letters there might be at the post-office there.

The simple creature came the very afternoon she received my letter, bringing a basket of cakes and fruit and a bottle of home-made wine (which I did not drink), and when she had kissed me, all the while blubbing and crying to see me so pale and thin, she gave me a letter she had got from the post. It was from Miss Norton, who wrote with a charming grace to tell me that arrangements were being made for the speedy marriage of Captain Bromley and Miss Howard, and asking me for news.

But the thing of most importance was this. When Eliza had sighed off the last of her distress, and I got her to tell me what had been happening lately at Faulcondale, she astounded me by the information that Mr. Everleigh had called on Miss Trevor the day before to ask after his friends, whom he had heard were gone from that neighbourhood. I could think of nothing but that; however, I contrived to be affectionate and talk of other matters with Eliza all the same, who promised to walk over and see me the next day if she could get out.

After wondering what deep game Dr. Norman was at now

by this visit to Faulcondale, and thinking over it for some hours, I was suddenly struck with an idea for communicating with Mrs. Norman.

I got up, and having procured paper and ink, I wrote in a bold hand, on a single sheet, so that the whole might be read at a glance :

‘If you wish to be rescued from death, return this by bearer.’

This I enclosed in an envelope ; I wrote no address on the outside, and left the flap ungummed. This message I intended to send to Mrs. Norman by Eliza, and I fancy I may claim credit for ingenuity in the plan I proposed.

I waited with impatience for the girl’s coming, but I had to wait until Sunday. She sent me a letter on Thursday wetted with tears—I never knew such a girl for crying and laughing by turns—to say that Miss Trevor was angry with her for staying so long on Wednesday, and refused to let her go out again ; ‘but I will sea yer on Sunda’, she concluded, ‘if i dye fur’t.’

The delay was no fault of hers, for she could not help being a fool, so I resolved not to be angry with her, especially as I stood in need of her help. But this waste of time, when it was so precious, galled me excessively. My impatience, however, did something towards restoring me to health, for I could no longer lie still in bed—where the artful landlord, under pretence of healing me, would have kept me ever so much longer in order to get money out of my pocket—and, as I was now merely suffering from weakness, the exercise I got gave me appetite and brought me round.

On Sunday my country sweetheart came in her marvellous bonnet, her best skirts tucked up to show her stiff bombazine petticoat and thick man’s boots to advantage—stars ! how the graceful and handsome Miss Norton would have scorned me for taking notice of such a rustic—her face bathed in perspiration with the haste she had made to get over the ten miles that divided her from me. She nearly smothered me with her embraces, and half a minute afterwards she was eating her share of a cake she had brought in her pocket. She was a picture—of a certain sort, and I would have liked a good artist to have caught her when I began to unfold my scheme to her—the perspiration still standing on her face like rain-drops on a poppy, her blue eyes wide open, with no

more expression in them than if they had been a couple of buttons, the crumbs of cake sticking on her thick red lips, and a good half of her white teeth—they were perfection, I admit—fairly revealed.

I had already told her a tale suited to her intelligence to account for my having left Beauchamp Moat and fallen ill, and I now informed her that if my master would not take me back into his service I should have to enlist as a soldier and be shot for my country, which so moved the innocent creature that she forgot her cake and let the tears trickle down her cheeks, heedless of her stiff blue bow, on which they fell.

‘Now,’ said I, ‘I want you to take a letter to my master.’ She started up at once.

‘We will walk together towards the Moat, and as we go I will make you understand what you are to do.’

She was eager to save me from a soldier’s death—indeed, I believe she would have done anything I wished—and we started off at once.

I foresaw what would happen, and told her that when she rang the gate-bell a servant would come out to her with a slate, on which was written: ‘Write what you want.’ On this slate she would write: ‘I want to see Dr. Norman. I am Eliza from Faulcondale.’ The servant would go away with the slate, and either Dr. Norman or Mrs. Norman would come out to the gate, and to one or the other of these two—but not to the servant—she was to give the sheet of paper that I had put in the envelope to keep clean. If the paper should be given back to her it would be a sign that it was all right, and I shouldn’t have to go for a soldier, and she was to bring back the good news to me.

I knew very well that Dr. Norman would be careful not to show himself to Eliza, as that would betray his identity with Mr. Everleigh, but I felt sure his curiosity and suspicion would not permit him to let her go away without knowing what she had come about. This he could not find out except through Mrs. Norman, for Eliza’s handwriting was of such an extraordinary kind that it was as much as ever she would be able to crowd in the few words she had to write, using both sides of the slate.

I repeated my instructions again and again—warning her especially against letting the paper go out of her hands into

the servant's—and so impressed her with the importance of carrying out my instructions carefully, that I felt at last the girl might be trusted to do this rather delicate mission.

We separated when the gables of Beauchamp Moat were in sight, and as she plodded along the road I slipped into the wood and worked my way round to the west of the house, where, from behind a thicket, I could see what took place, though at too great a distance to hear what might be said.

I got to my point of observation after the bell had rung, and just as Martha came through the gateway to the wicket. I could hear the dog, who during the day was fastened within the gateway so that communication should be open between the kitchen and the wicket, barking furiously all the while that my trusty Eliza was laboriously writing her message—full ten minutes, I believe. Then Martha took the slate, and disappeared. There was an interval of five minutes or thereabouts, and then, as I had expected and hoped, Mrs. Norman came to the wicket—Martha standing in the gateway

I saw Eliza pull the paper out of the envelope and put it in the lady's hand ; but from Eliza changing her position I could not see the result. However, I had reason to believe the scheme had succeeded, for presently Eliza turned about and ran off at the top of her speed in the direction she had come.

When I overtook her she thrust the paper in my hand and flung her arms round my neck, crying :

'You ain't to go a-soldiering, my dear sweetheart.'

I asked her what Mrs. Norman had said.

'Ne'er a word,' she replied. 'She took the letter and read it, and then she looked at me curious like, and then she looked at the paper again, and then she put it into my hand and didn't say nothing. Only when I said, "You'll let Peters come back again, ma'am?" she nodded, and then off I ran.'

I was glad to hear this, for it showed that Mrs. Norman had grasped some idea of explaining the girl's mission to her husband.

CHAPTER XIX.

CONTINUED FROM THE NARRATIVE OF THOMAS CRAIK.

IT may be supposed that I felt a little shaky when I again set out with the intention of getting into the Moat house. There was no knowing what mean devilry Dr. Norman might not have invented as safeguard and tell-tale, and I was not so well cured of my last wound as to be indifferent to another. I risked my life in this enterprise. It was only by good luck that I had escaped with a simple flesh wound; the next bullet might lodge in me; and it was certain the doctor would keep his pistol ready for me; but I had a notion of getting at Mrs. Norman by a way where he could not lay his lines of telegraphic communication. I had yet to find whether I could get into the house by the way I had left open, and whether the cut in the partition had been discovered.

One thing was in my favour: the doctor had not seen me, and my blood-marks, leading to the discovery of the way in which I escaped, might lead him to suppose that it was an ordinary thief, who had got into the house by the sitting-room window.

There had been heavy thunder-storms during the day; the night was close and heavy and hot; a thick mist had risen and lay along the valleys; while the dense clouds that still hung over the sky added to the obscurity. I must have lost my way had it been less familiar to me, but I had no occasion on such a dark night as this to leave the road until I came to the opening in the woods in which the house stood.

I skirted the edge of the woods, feeling my way as I went, for there was no seeing, until I came upon the little stream that ran down the hill on the north side of the house. Then I knew where I was. I crossed the water, went on for a dozen yards as I reckoned, and turning down at a right angle, presently saw the dark mass of the house looming through the mist; another step or two brought me to the edge of the moat, and feeling my way first a little south and then to the north, I came upon the brickwork that had served as a support for the wooden bridge. Then I had only to slip into the ditch, cross it, and I should come to the old door.

I sat down, and launching myself off as I had done before, slipped into the moat. But here was a surprise for me that took all the breath out of my body : the moat was no longer empty.

There was no stopping myself—I went down until my feet touched the bottom, and the water was up to my arm-pits. I stood gasping there for a couple of minutes, undecided what to do—whether to scramble back or to go on. I could get no wetter, and the ditch I knew was no deeper on the other side, for some rubbish there formed a heap which made an entrance by the door easier. I waded on, cursing the ingenuity of Dr. Norman.

If there was any consolation to be got from being half drowned, it was this : the doctor had not suspected my secret, and had turned the water of the stream into the moat to stop would-be thieves from entering by the windows on the west side. There was further proof of this in the door being as I left it—unfastened ; which it certainly would not have been had he known the real facts of the case. I opened the door, dragged myself up, and then groped my way to the upper floor. The matches in my pocket were wet, of course, and the new lantern I had brought with me was useless. I felt about for my hopper, and had the satisfaction of finding that as I had left it. Then I took off my clothes, wrung them as dry as I could, stuck them about wherever they would hang, and drawing out the hopper, crept into the loft and smothered myself in straw, in which I slept with tolerable comfort until the morning.

I dressed myself in my damp clothes, and not wishing to make them wetter than they were, I looked about for a means of crossing the moat otherwise than on the last occasion. There was no time to lose, for it was already lighter than I wished, and Martha was seldom down later than six.

I found a tolerably sound piece of board about eight feet long, and carried it down to the door. As I have said, the brickwork which had held the bridge still stood, and my piece of board reached the pier in the middle with a foot to spare ; by this means I got on to the pier, taking care to close the door well after me ; and standing on that, I drew over the board and dropped it across to the further edge of

the moat, and thus I got over dry foot. I carried the board up into the wood and thrust it amongst the herbage by the side of the stream for future use.

I passed the day at Faulcondale instead of Lipley, for my landlord was just curious enough about my affairs to take it into his head to watch me in my expeditions. There I provided myself with all I needed, and shortly after midnight I once more entered Beauchamp Moat, making use of the board to get in without a wetting, and drawing it in after me.

By the light of my dark lantern I arranged my store of food—I had brought as much as I could carry—so that the rats, of which there were abundance, couldn't get at the eatables; and then, being anything but sleepy, for I had taken a long rest in the afternoon, I sat down to reflect. One would think that former experience had led me to shrink from more risk than could possibly be avoided; but it was not at all so. My passion for adventure grew stronger by the difficulties in this undertaking; moreover, I was piqued by the advantage Dr. Norman had hitherto won over me, and I thirsted to take my revenge and get the better of him. And so, sitting there with nothing between me and Mrs. Norman's room but a certain length of passage and a wooden hopper, I was tempted strongly to adventure that way with a view to slipping under her door the letter I had already written. I was not fearful of being again betrayed by Dr. Norman's electric apparatus, knowing exactly where my leg had struck the thread, and having my lantern to look for it; but when I thought of my ducking in the moat, and the ingenuity with which the doctor contrived to meet all dangers, and reflected on the grave importance of soon getting more money, prudence prevailed, and I abandoned this project. And lucky for me it was that I did so, for that attempt would surely have been my last had I made it. This I discovered the next morning.

A little before six, as I was looking from the ivied window to see if Martha was yet about, the kitchen door opened, and Dr. Norman, in his slippers and dressing-gown, came into the court. He stopped by the dog-kennel, and called; then from the house the villainous-looking dog crept out, and slunk up to him to be attached to the chain. The beast was now allowed the run of the house at night, thus securing

Mrs. Norman in her room, preventing her from leaving it, or others from communicating with her. This settled the question as to how Mrs. Norman was to be approached.

I spent all the day in studying the means at my disposal, and making preparations for my next attempt; and I watched the approach of night with anxiety. A breeze had sprung up and cleared the clouds and mist away. It was an important change for me. The moon rose about nine, and shone with such unpleasant brilliancy that I determined to postpone my venture to another night, when the weather might be more favourable to the hazardous undertaking. And so with reluctance I lay down on my straw bed to sleep. But I could not sleep for thinking of the opportunities I had let slip, the time wasted in following a wrong scent, the skill with which Dr. Norman had twisted me round his finger (shooting me through the leg into the bargain), the importance of expedition, etc., etc.; and these reflections tormented me to such a degree that at length I could no longer lie still, and jumping up, I went to the window to see if by chance any clouds had sprung up. There was not a trace of cloud anywhere, and the moon shone more brilliantly than ever. It looked like set fine, and I said to myself that I might have to lie in the straw for a fortnight if I waited for a more favourable night.

Looking round the court, I found all still and dark, except where the moonlight fell on part of the west and north wings. It seemed to me that I had been lying on the straw four or five hours, and I concluded that it must be about two o'clock. All I had to fear was that Dr. Norman might accidentally wake and come to the window during the next half-hour. That was most unlikely—and an accident which might occur at any time, and must be included amongst the hazards of my enterprise. And being on this train of reasoning, with impatience and wishes allied to support my argument, it was not long before I came to the belief that no time could be better than the present for the work to be done.

I had already written the letter to be given to Mrs. Norman, and attached to it a dozen yards of twine, and I now examined it once more to be sure that the knots were secure, and the hook at the other end of the twine well secured; and putting it in an inside pocket that it might

not meet with the same accident that came to my lantern, I buttoned up my coat and made a start.

The arrangements I had made enabled me to climb without difficulty from the floor to the roof tree, and making my way through the ivy, I presently got outside on the gable ridge. I had part of the east, the whole of the south, and two-thirds of the west wings to pass, before getting over Mrs. Norman's room. When I got to the angle formed by the east and south wings, I stopped in my course and looked down. I could see my shadow cut out clearly on the courtyard—the moon being now over my left shoulder. In the opposite angle of the house was Dr. Norman's room. The window was open. Now, if anything should induce him to come to his window, it would be all over with me, for there I sat on the roof-top in the moonlight as fair a mark to shoot at as any sportsman could wish for—and no escape. This consideration urged me onward, and on my hands and knees I crawled along the ridge-tiles as fast as I dared.

Halfway along the south roof I stopped, for a rotten ridge-tile snapped with disagreeable clearness under my weight, and a pellet of mortar fell with a 'tapple, tappple, tappple,' down the tiles, and a 'clink' into the gutter under the eaves. With my hair bristling I glanced down into the court. To my horror I perceived there was a light in the laboratory; for I had come to a position whence I could see the whole of the north wing. From the window in the east wing I had only commanded that part upon which the moon shone; but now I saw the end, which was still in shadow, and there alone the light within was visible through the green blinds.

At that moment the clock in the kitchen struck, and to my strained ear every beat was audible. It struck twelve; my impatience had misled me by a couple of hours. What was the price I might have to pay for this last mistake? Obviously Dr. Norman was still in the laboratory; I was exactly opposite. If he came to the window, alarmed by the rattle over the tiles, and by the growling of the dog below, he could scarcely fail to see me. He might already have seen me! In another moment I might see him step out into the moonlight in the courtyard, pistol in hand, to pick me off with no more ceremony than if I were a cat. I had such a lively dread of another bullet, that I resolved

that if the worst came to the worst I would slide down the roof and drop into the moat, and chance what might befall me in the descent.

But happily there was no immediate necessity for this proceeding; the noise had failed to alarm Dr. Norman; so, after a few minutes of fearful suspense, I arranged the broken tile so that it should not fall, and pursued my way to the end of the south wing, and there I felt that the chief danger was passed, for now the doctor would need to cross the courtyard to see me. I got to a stack of chimneys in the west wing, and now I felt absolutely safe, for not only would the brickwork help to conceal me, but it would protect me from bullets in case of discovery.

About half-past twelve I heard the rattle of a window below, and this I concluded must be the doctor's, which I had noticed was wide open when I last looked at it, but that did not tempt me to hurry my operations. I waited until the kitchen clock struck two, and then I went back a certain distance to be sure there was no light in the laboratory before making the final move. Reassured by my observations, I crawled back to the chimney-stack, got round it with a little ticklish climbing, and then went onwards, counting the ridge tiles as I went, and stopping when I reached the forty-sixth. This, as I knew by examinations made from a window in the opposite wing during the day, was exactly over the middle of Mrs. Norman's bedroom window. I pulled out my letter, unwound the string, and holding the end with the hook in my hand, I threw the letter, which I had weighted with a few nails, out in a straight line towards the court, for the pitch of the roof and the gutter under the eaves would not permit of its being slid down as I had at first purposed. I heard it tap against the wall of the house, then I drew it up carefully until I saw one corner of the envelope pricking up in front of the gutter, when I put out a length of string sufficient to reach, as I calculated, about half-way down the window, wound up the rest and tied it in a loop, and fixed the hook under the edge of the ridge tile. This done, I carefully crawled back along the roof, and at length arrived safely at the ivy-covered point from which I had started. From thence I could see my letter hanging in front of Mrs. Norman's window, and exactly where I wished it to be.

She could not draw up her blind in the morning without seeing it.

There was still the possibility of its being discovered before Mrs. Norman rose, but that possibility was slight. Dr. Norman would have to lean out of his window or look up from the courtyard to catch sight of it, and it was not his habit to stare about aimlessly. As for Martha, she kept her window constantly closed, and in the morning had too much to do to occupy herself with looking after things that did not concern her. Nevertheless, I watched the course of events with considerable anxiety from my screen of ivy in the east wing.

At six o'clock Dr. Norman came down in his dressing-gown, fastened the dog to his kennel, and returned to the house. The blind of his window was not raised, so I concluded that he had gone back to bed.

Soon after that Martha came from the kitchen with mats to shake, and went back again. At half-past seven the blind of Mrs. Norman's window rose. I held my breath for a couple of minutes in fear lest the letter might escape notice; it came again in a sigh of relief as the window was pushed back, and Mrs. Norman took the letter in her hand and read the address. She leaned forward, glanced towards her husband's window and down in the court, then slipped the string off the letter. This is what I had written in the letter:

'A friend is at hand. He has already risked his life in your behalf. He will risk it again to help you, though he should once more be shot in the attempt. But nothing can be done to save you unless you help to save yourself. You must follow these instructions if you wish to escape. Cut the string with which this was let down, as high up as you can reach, that it may not be seen. In the course of the day write a few words saying that you go in fear of your life, that you are not allowed to write freely to your friends, and asking to be released from your husband. Wait until you are absolutely sure that Dr. Norman and Martha are asleep to-morrow night, then tie your letter to the end of the string hanging from the eaves. If this is not practicable, wait until you see a fresh string with a weight at the end lowered, then tie it to that. Twenty-four hours after this you shall be free.'

A couple of minutes passed, and then Mrs. Norman again came to the window, and after making sure that no one observed her, she raised her hands and cut off the string with a pair of scissors above the level of the casement. I was in ecstasies, and, rendered audacious by success, took my board, bridged the moat, and got away through the woods unseen, though at a risk which (considering that the people of the house were now up and about) was not far short of foolhardiness.

It was after midnight when I again entered the house. The moon again was excessively bright, and I distinctly saw something white at the end of the string under the eaves. More than that, I saw Mrs. Norman's face from time to time at the window. This showed that Dr. Norman was no longer up; but I waited as patiently as I could until the clock struck one before I ventured to leave the ruined wing, and creep up through the ivy to the solid roof. To Mrs. Norman, watching at her window, I must have looked weird and ghostly indeed, rising up against the moonlight. I saw her as I crept along standing by the window with her hands clasped, and I stopped to take off my cap. I got round without accident and drew up the letter, which was tied to the end of the string. When I returned to my starting place, I held it up in the moonlight to show Mrs. Norman that I had it safe.

CHAPTER XX.

FROM THE NARRATIVE OF THE REV. DR. BULLEN.

IT was between four and five in the morning of the 18th September that I was aroused by a violent ring at the garden-bell, and, scarce awake, turned out of my bed and went to the window. The bell rang again before I could throw up the sash, though I had lost so little time that my senses were still dull with sleep.

'Dr. Bullen,' cried a man's voice.

'Here am I,' I replied.

'I've something important to tell you, sir; for the love of heaven' (or some such apostrophe) 'come down at once!'

I did not recognise the speaker in the gray light, the moon being sunk behind the elms; but I made no doubt his business concerned Mrs. Norman, for the misfortunes of this unhappy lady weighed heavily on my mind, and despite some reassuring correspondence shown me by Captain Bromley, I took a gloomy view of her position, and never went to bed without assuring myself that the spare room was ready for her use should she come to me again for shelter.

I slipped on a pair of slippers and my gown, ran down-stairs with all speed, and opening the door, perceived that my visitor was the young man Peters, who had done so much to save Mrs. Norman on the day I by an ill chance suffered her to fall into the hands of her husband. I took him into the parlour, where he told me a marvellous tale of the efforts he had been making to get from Mrs. Norman a true and free statement of her condition, which, if it be but half true, shows a degree of courage and devotion not often reached by young men of his class in these days.

‘Well,’ said I, when he had recounted his last exploit, ‘and have you managed to keep the letter safe and sound?’

‘Yes, sir,’ he replied, pulling it out of his pocket, and clapping it in my hand; ‘and there it is.’

I took the letter to the window, and made out these words (or some similar in sense), written in trembling and weak characters:

‘I am not mad. Is it not proof enough that I know my name is Edith, and that I am married to Norman Norman? Were I mad, could I be conscious of all the misery I have to endure? I am imprisoned here, and my husband is goading me to destruction. I have written letters imploring help, and given them to Martha, to the tradespeople, and to beggars; I have thrown them in the road, hoping they would be picked up by strangers; all have been returned to me to show me there is no hope of escape—all except that which I wrote under my husband’s direction, and with the hope of obtaining his mercy. The misery of my life is inconceivable; I can bear it no longer.

‘You say that in twenty-four hours I shall be free. It is my last hope. If it fail, I will put an end to my wretched life. I will wait twenty-four hours from the time this is

taken. May God have mercy upon me for what I do after that in despair, for my misery is no longer to be endured.

‘EDITH NORMAN.

September 17th, 1884.’

‘What is this,’ I asked, looking up from the letter when I had read it, ‘about being free in twenty-four hours? Who has made that promise?’

The young man admitted that he had done so, and his sheepish air seemed to imply that he had made the promise in a spirit of bravado and boastfulness; but he justified it by saying it was necessary to inspire confidence and hope in order to get a reply to his letter.

‘But,’ said I, ‘what is the use of the letter without means to rescue the lady?’

‘Why, sir, that letter supplies the means,’ he replied; ‘for surely, if you will be so good as to show that to a justice of the peace, he will give you a warrant to get Mrs. Norman released.’

I shook my head, for I knew something more of our county justices than to credit them with so much common-sense. For these worthy gentlemen are so impressed with the majesty of the letter of the law, that they are somewhat dull to the spirit of justice, and for fear of overstepping the former they will, more frequently than not, stop short of the latter—except where rabbits or their own rights are concerned.

‘There is not a justice of the peace in this county,’ said I, ‘who could make up his mind in twenty-four days to take the responsibility of such an act on his shoulders.’

Then, looking at my clock, I saw that it would be time saved to go up to London for justice rather than to puddle about the country hunting up justice with no stronger claim than this poor lady’s letter. For certainly, if Valentine Bromley, thought I, is the man I take him to be, he’ll no sooner see this letter than he’ll take justice in his own hands, and, with a couple of good strong navvies, force that prison and get out his suffering sister. That was my idea of justice, and how I should have acted in his place.

‘Come, my lad,’ said I, ‘let us bustle about and lose no time. We’re committed to save this lady in twenty-four hours, and save her we must. Therefore, run you down to

the George Hotel at Litley, and fetch a sound chaise and a decent horse, while I get into my clothes. Here,' said I, taking a card out of my desk and two bright half-crowns, 'give this card to the folk at the hotel, and say I must have a trap to take me to Barstow at once, on a matter of life and death, and you won't have to wait long. These five shillings you may put in your pocket, for you have deserved them.'

The lad did not wait to bandy words over the matter, but tripped off like a lamplighter.

I dressed myself, wrote out some instructions for Elizabeth, took a hearty drink of milk in the larder, cut myself a hunch of bread to eat on the road, and was out against the garden-gate by the time Peters, with a lad from the George, came up in a dog-cart at a gallop.

'I shall be 'back with help before nightfall,' said I to Peters.

'But if you're not, sir?' said he inquiringly.

'Then, my lad,' I replied, 'it will be your duty to do what lays in your power for this lady. You may be able to convey another note to her begging her to have patience.'

'But supposing I do better than that, sir—suppose I get her out of that house.'

'Then,' said I, putting into his hand the door-key of my house, which I carry in my pocket habitually, 'then you may bring her here, and hold my house as a castle till succour comes.'

It was eleven o'clock by the time the train got into the London terminus, and past mid-day when the cabman pulled up before Fairlawn House.

I ran up the drive, knocked at the door, and asked to see Captain Bromley.

'Oh, sir,' replied the smart maid, with an arch smile, 'you're half an hour too late: they went off at half-past eleven.'

'Went off? they? where? who?'

'Why, sir, Mr. Valentine and Miss Howard, who is his wife by this time, I dare say, for they went off to be married.'

I remembered now that this, being the 18th, was the day appointed for the marriage, of which Valentine had written me, kindly inviting me to be of the small party—a fact which I had quite overlooked in thinking of Mrs. Norman.

I learnt from the girl the name of the church at which the young people were to be married, and bade the cabman drive me thither, for my news could not be kept back from Valentine and his bride, though it should enforce a postponement of their happiness. Before I could get to the church, Valentine and Dorothea were man and wife.

The sexton was closing the door of the church as I arrived.

‘A lady and gentleman are here being married,’ said I.

‘It’s done, sir,’ he replied; ‘all over! and they’ve been gone this five minutes.’

‘Do you know where?’ I asked.

‘I believe, sir, as they’ve gone down to the railway-station; but if you’d like to see the clergyman as united ’em——’

I would not wait for that, but getting into the cab, told the driver to take me to the station; my inquiries there were fruitless. Valentine and his wife were in plain morning dress, and I saw on the platform a dozen of such ladies and gentlemen, while every few minutes brought a change of faces with the incoming trains.

It was past two when I got back to Fairlawn. A close carriage stood before the door. A couple of servants were talking in a whisper on the steps. The maid who had spoken to me before came forward with a scared face as I stepped out of the cab.

‘Have you found them, sir?’ she asked.

I shook my head.

‘Well, there now,’ said she, brightening up. ‘I’m sure I am glad of it for their sakes.’

‘Why? What has happened?’ I asked.

‘Oh, don’t you know, sir? But there, of course you don’t, for it’s happened since you were here—Mrs. Bromley has had another attack, and she is dying.’

‘Who is with her?’

‘No one but the two doctors, and I heard them say nothing could be done, and it’s all over this time.’

‘And where is her son gone?’ I asked.

The girl looked at me with her sly eyes in doubt a moment, and then said she did not know. But I saw this was not true, and that with a girl’s sentimental sympathy she did not wish to convey this sad news to the newly-married couple. The only person, she said, who could have told me was Mrs. Bromley, but she could no longer speak.

I asked if she knew when Captain Bromley and Mrs. Valentine were expected to return.

‘To-morrow,’ she replied.

‘Surely, my dear,’ said I, ‘he would not leave his mother even for a day in her critical state of health, without giving instructions as to where he might be found in case of necessity!’

The girl grew red, and in confusion left me, saying she would ask of another servant. After keeping me some time, she came back to tell me that Captain Bromley had gone to Richmond, and was to be found at the Royal George. Thus was another precious half-hour lost, and by a little under that space did I miss Valentine at Richmond, where, at the hotel, I learnt that the party had gone out in a carriage, and were to return for a seven o’clock dinner.

Referring to a time-table, I found the train to Barstow, which must be taken to save Mrs. Norman, left London at 7.45, and to catch that it was necessary to leave Richmond not later than 6.45.

I ordered some refreshment, and wrote a letter to Valentine, telling him my errand—an unthankful and dolorous one, indeed. I waited until ten minutes to seven, and then, seeing no sign of their return, I left my letter with the waiter, to be given to Captain Bromley, and hurried off to the station.

I got a fly at Barstow; nevertheless, it was half-past twelve by the time I reached Orwell. Thence, by the nearest way across the hills, it was an hour’s smart walking, and by road pretty nearly as long a drive, to Beauchamp Moat. There was not a minute to spare. My good old servant, Elizabeth, came to the door the moment I knocked.

‘Has anyone called—is anybody here?’ I asked.

‘No, sir,’ she replied. ‘A messenger brought this, and that is all.’

She put a telegram in my hand, and I read it while she ran off to find my thick stick. For it was now clear I must take the matter in my own hands. The telegram was from Valentine Bromley, and sent from Richmond. He said briefly that he would come as soon as possible—that meant that he could only come when it was too late to be of use. But how could it be otherwise? His first duty was to return to the bedside of his mother. The flyman was yet at the gate waiting to be paid.

'You can go home by the old London Road,' I said to him.

'Well, sir,' says he, 'it's a long way round, and it's a run road at night; but it is pretty clear, and if so be you want me to go that way, sir——'

'I do,' said I, 'and I will pay you for the extra work; drive on until you come to the old house with a moat round it.'

'Oh, Beecham Moat! I know that. All right, sir.'

I bade him drive as quickly as his horse would go, and took my seat.

Not the least difficult part of my undertaking lay before me. I had to wake Dr. Norman and insist upon his making provision to deter his wife from committing violence upon herself.

I resolved, if necessary, to force my way into the house, and stay there until Captain Bromley came.

The only thing that should prevent me was physical force, and I felt myself and my oak stick a match for the slim doctor. But even if I did not succeed in that, the very ringing of the bell and the sound of my voice at this hour would convince Mrs. Norman that help was at hand, and so inspire her with hope. I ran the risk of getting into trouble with my bishop by taking the law into my hands; but bishop or no bishop, I could not disregard the possibility of evil befalling one of my parishioners.

As I sat revolving these things in my mind, I perceived through the windows in the front of the fly that my driver had risen from his seat and was standing on tiptoe, with one hand on the top of the carriage. But presently he sat down again and lit his pipe.

We were now in the old London Road, and rather less than four miles from the Moat. A smart wind had sprung up, and brought up a few clouds in the sky. But the moon shone fair and bright the greater part of the time. A big cumulus cloud was just creeping over the edge of the moon, when up jumped my coachman once more with his pipe in his hand, and though the cloud threw the country round into obscurity, he stood still.

I put my head out of the window, and asked what was the matter.

'There's a rick a-fire over there, or I'm a Dutchman,' he

replied, pointing ahead with his pipe. 'I thought I smelt 'um five minutes ago.'

I craned my neck out as far as I could, and, looking in the direction indicated, I saw a glow over the pine-woods; it pulsated almost like a northern light, and I should have attributed the glow to that phenomenon but for a smell of burning that came down on the breeze.

'It's a jolly big rick, too,' said the coachman.

'Why,' said I, 'there is never a rick-yard between Lipley and Faulcondale that I know of, and no farmhouse nor building of any kind except Beauchamp Moat.'

'Then it's Beecham Moat that's a-fire,' replied he sententiously.

He flogged his horse into a gallop, greatly excited (and pleased too, it seemed to me) with the prospect of seeing the house in flames, and I continued to crane out of window, with I know not what new fears and apprehensions, until we entered the fir wood. There, sitting in the fly and looking through the front windows, I could see, at the end of the vista formed by the straight cutting through the wood, the red glow of the fire growing every moment more distinct. Before long the light was obscured, and a dense volume of smoke enveloped us, causing the eyes to smart, and tickling the throat. This drew forth a facetious remark from the coachman, and in high glee he whipped the horse more vigorously than before.

And now objects in the road were made visible by the reflected glow from the sky above, and under the fir-trees the ground was flicked here and there with patches of light; again a cloud of smoke, thicker and more pungent, blew down, choking me, and obliging me to shut my eyes, and then, as it cleared off, and I looked up, I saw sparks eddying in the air, and an ember as long as my little finger flickered down past the window.

'Oh, my eye! here's a good 'un!' exclaimed the driver, after a fit of coughing, caused by the stifling smoke, but cheerfully, as if it were a pleasant sensation.

And then we came to a part where the falling of sparks frightened the horse, and despite the cries and flogging of the driver, the beast stood still, trembling and snorting. I leapt out, and ran on until I came to the opening in which the moated house stood, and there a terrible sight burst

upon me. The whole of what I may call the west and north wings were in flames, and the fire was bursting out of the windows in the south wing and up through the open roof on the north end of the ruined side. The greatest body of flame rose from the corner of the west wing, in which Mrs. Norman's and Dr. Norman's bedrooms were situated. The walls were chiefly of timber, with plaster and brickwork between. The latter had, for the most part, given way and fallen out, leaving, as it were, nothing but the skeleton of the building in that portion standing. The lighter timbers of the roof had fallen in, but the heavier joists and beams forming the flooring of the upper story, tough yet and solid, stood out and made a kind of gridiron, through which the flames from the lower story shot up, carrying a myriad of burning embers and sparks that floated above like a swarm of fire-flies.

It was clear that unless the doctor and his wife had escaped from their rooms they must have been utterly destroyed long ere now. It astonished me then to see the fire so much fiercer in this part than elsewhere, and I could not make out what fed such a vast body of flame; for it was not until the inquest that I learnt how the lower rooms had been used by Peters as a carpenter's shop, and contained a great quantity of light planks, shavings, etc.

It was indeed a terrible, yet a grand sight, and the splendour of it was increased by the water which filled the moat, and reflected the raging flames and clouds of sparks above like a mirror dulled now and then by puffs of steam, as a blazing beam fell hissing into it. And this steam seemed to invigorate the fire, and it was curious to see how the flames curled and twisted, and shot out hither and thither, seeking, as it were, for fresh food, dropping fiery saliva, licking the woodwork, and leaving the trace of its destroying tongue, as it darted away in greedy impatience lest anything should escape. The heat, albeit I was well on the windward side of the fire, was terrible, so that at times when the breeze lulled I had to screen my face with my hat, and fall back some paces. I cast my eye about in all directions, to see if I could find anywhere the poor creature whom I had come there to serve—alas! too late. But except myself there seemed to be no living soul there, until the coachman, who had forsaken his fly and horse, came

up. But that which gave me some hope was that the hooded gig had been drawn out, and stood at some little distance from the moat.

‘Surely,’ thought I, ‘if there was time to rescue this thing from destruction, all hope of Mrs. Norman’s deliverance is not lost.’

Whilst I was contemplating the scene which I was powerless in any way to alter, a hand was laid upon my arm, and, turning about, I discovered the deaf mute by my side.

‘Your mistress—where is she?’ I asked, forgetting for the moment her incapacity to understand or answer me.

She shook her head; but had she possessed the faculty of speech, I could not have heard her there for the roar of the flames, the crackling of the timbers, and the continual hissing as embers, brickwork, and molten lead tumbled into the water. I drew her away from the heat, for the flames were now bursting out of the south wing from the water’s edge to the roof, and with what composure I could muster I proceeded to question her in the deaf-mute alphabet.

‘Your mistress?’ I asked.

She shook her head, and pointed into the flames still raging in the west wing.

‘Your master?’ I next asked.

‘In London,’ she replied.

‘Are you sure your mistress had not escaped?’

She nodded, and then informed me that her mistress could not pass the dog. He was alive long after the fire broke out, and raging at his chain. No one could have passed. His kennel was in the gateway. He was suffocated not a quarter of an hour ago, when the fire was close to the gate.

‘How did you pass?’

‘I was not in there when the fire broke out,’ she replied.

By a tedious series of questions and answers, I learnt that in the afternoon she had driven to Barstow with Dr. Norman, and left him at the station, where she was to seek him in the morning. Before leaving the Moat, the doctor, who alone dared to approach the dog, had drawn the kennel into the court to allow of her entering by the gateway; when she returned, she found that the beast had dragged the kennel into the gateway, and rendered it impossible for her to pass. She had tied up the horse in the

wood, and at nightfall had made herself comfortable in the gig. There she had fallen asleep, and been awoken by the glare of light. The west wing was then in flames. The wicket, of which she had the key, was shut, and the dog was raging in the gateway.

The story seemed improbable, and I could not believe the woman. Nay, I went so far as to accuse her in my mind of having fired the house and destroyed Mrs. Norman. Heaven forgive me !

CHAPTER XXI.

FROM THE NARRATIVE OF DOROTHEA BROMLEY.

I do not desire to extenuate my faults. I wish only to narrate the terrible events that occurred in the month of November, and later, impartially, and to give a clear account of the circumstances which guided me step by step towards my ruin, that I may be judged not more harshly than my offence requires.

On the 18th September, Valentine Bromley made me his wife. We were married by special license, and quite privately.

‘Is there no one you would like to be present?’ Valentine asked.

‘No, dear,’ I answered; ‘no one but Miss Trevor and my guardian. And you,’ I added, ‘you have no friends?’

‘None that I care to ask,’ he replied. ‘It must needs be a prosaic wedding, Doris; the poetry will come after.’

I was quite content that it should be so. Mrs. Bromley’s critical state of health was not consistent with rejoicing—except of that kind which dwells quietly in the heart.

Before going to church we went into Mrs. Bromley’s room to bid her good-bye. She joined our hands and said, ‘God bless you both.’ Esther Norton promised not to leave her room until we returned.

Then we went to the church—Valentine and I—with Miss Trevor and our dear old professor. Besides ourselves, no one was present at the ceremony, except the clergyman, his clerk, and a pew-opener. When the ring was on my finger, and Valentine, kissing me, said, ‘You are my wife

now, darling,' I felt that I was now indeed a woman, and that my real life had begun. That brought serious thoughts to my mind, but I was very happy at the same time, and I spoke with my whole heart when I said to Valentine, 'I will try to be a good wife, love.'

The carriage that had brought us to the church took us on to Richmond. There we had lunch, and the professor, who had been very gay, made a little speech full of pretty sentiment and kindly feeling. Afterwards we went for a drive through the lovely park, and coming to a village beside the water, Valentine found a boat, and he and the professor rowed us up-stream. My guardian was not a good rower, but that only made it more amusing; nobody laughed more than he at the mistakes he made. Coming back I took an oar, and when I got accustomed to the exercise, I enjoyed it greatly. It was the happiest afternoon I had ever had.

It was late when we returned to the hotel, where we were to dine.

The waiter handed two letters to Valentine. He took them to the window to read, the light being faint. His back was to us, but I saw he had received a shock. His hand holding the paper dropped by his side, and he bowed his head in silence. I went to his side.

'My mother is gone,' he said in a broken voice, putting the paper in my hand. It was a telegram from Esther Norton.

While I read it he broke open the other envelope. It contained two sheets of paper. He stifled an exclamation as he read one and the other. Then without a word he put them in my hands. One was a short note from Dr. Bullen, the other was a message written by Mrs. Norman.

'You must go at once, dear,' I said.

'Yes,' he answered; and going quickly to the door, he ordered the horses to be put in the carriage.

While this was being done he looked in the time-table, and wrote down some figures. It was eight o'clock when we reached Fairlawn. Norton told us that Mrs. Bromley had fallen asleep immediately after our departure. The girl had only quitted the room to answer Dr. Bullen's inquiries; after that she had returned. Going to the bedside, she found that Mrs. Bromley had not moved; then,

alarmed by her stillness, she touched the lady's hand, and found that she was dead.

After seeing the doctor, Valentine took leave of me.

'I must go to Edith,' he said. 'Heaven grant I may be in time to save the unhappy soul!'

He went away, leaving me with Miss Trevor and my guardian at Fairlawn; and so ended my wedding-day.

He did not ask me to go with him, nor did I ask him to take me. I felt sure he had considered the subject, and seen that it was inadvisable for me to accompany him. I should have only impeded his action. I saw by his firm manner that, if force were necessary to take Mrs. Norman away from that house, he would employ it. Had I been a man, I should have done as he did—I said that to myself. Nevertheless, it seemed hard to me that we should be separated, and that I could be of no help to my husband.

How terrible it was after we had said good-bye, and I returned through the silent passage to the drawing-room, where Miss Trevor and my guardian were talking in an undertone! Everyone seemed awed by the presence of death in the house. The servants moved about noiselessly; they spoke in whispers, as though they feared the sound of their voices. One could not help thinking of death, with Mrs. Bromley lying in the room above, and Mrs. Norman menaced with a fate yet more terrible; with these thoughts in our minds it was impossible to talk rationally as at other times. Every now and then one would ask a question, and it would be answered; then a silence followed, in which the quick ticking of the timepiece on the chimney, unnoticed till then, struck the ear noticeably. It seemed to say, 'I go on, I go on, I go on,' as if mocking at humanity and those who fall in the race with time.

It was yet more terrible when we separated, and we went to our rooms. I could not sleep. I was oppressed with a grim foreboding, terrified with a dread of I knew not what. It was useless to say to myself, 'You are childish. It is absurd to dread a calamity that you cannot define. The things that have happened are the natural result of certain definite conditions, and it is merely vulgar superstition to suppose that, because the first day of your married life has ended darkly, the sun is not to shine in the days to come.' The terrible thoughts would not forsake me; and when,

trying to fix my mind on our wedding, I began to lose consciousness, the old pew-opener came towards me with something white hanging over her arm.

'You have no veil,' she said; 'take this. It will do for such a marriage as yours.' And when I asked what it was she had brought me to wear, she replied, 'It is a winding-sheet.'

* * * * *

A little before ten the next morning I received a telegram from him. There had been a long delay at Sheffield—a goods train had run off the line. It was six o'clock in the morning when he arrived at Beauchamp Moat. The worst had happened, he told me. Nothing but a smouldering ruin remained of the house, and Mrs. Norman was buried in it.

Valentine did not return until the 22nd, having to be present at the official inquiry.

Our meeting was strange with those mingled feelings of joy and sorrow.

'It gives me life and light to be with you again,' he said. 'You lift my thoughts out of the sepulchre.'

But when the joy of meeting had given place to observation, I saw that he was yet troubled.

'I have done wrong,' he said, when I led him to talk about himself. 'If I had been more decided, Edith would be living now. I ought to have taken her away by force from that place.'

'But you took the opinion of your solicitor,' I urged.

'There was my fault. I ought to have taken the law into my own hands.' As I did not respond, he continued, 'I know the excuse you are making for me, Doris. We were doubtful whether Norman was a villain or a hard-headed man of science, acting for the best in a case that he alone could sound.'

'That is what I think, dear.'

'Then, if we thought him innocent, I did wrong in letting Peters act as if he were guilty. I should have settled that in my mind one way or the other. I did not, and I have probably been the cause of Edith's death.'

'How can that be?' I asked.

'Read that,' he said, handing me a newspaper—the *Lipley Sentinel*; 'you will see how it is. I should be glad never to hear another word about this thing.'

'We will not talk about it any more, dear,' I said, and I put aside the paper; but when I was alone, I turned to it again with avidity.

I found a long report of the inquest. I have the paper now. These are the passages that struck me:

Dr. Norman. I recognise the steel ornaments. They were upon the dress my wife wore when I left her. I recognise, also, the wedding-ring; it was upon her finger the last time I saw her. The fragments of calcined bone are human, beyond doubt, and the remains of my wife, I have every reason to believe.

Mr. Grote (solicitor, representing the friends of the deceased lady). As a scientific man, you would probably have an anatomical collection of human bones?

Dr. Norman. Certainly.

Mr. Grote. Where did you keep your collection?

Dr. Norman. In the laboratory—a hundred feet from the spot where these fragments were found.

Mr. Grote. Your bedroom adjoined Mrs. Norman's, we are told?

Dr. Norman. Yes.

Mr. Grote. Is it not likely that you had taken the collection into your room by any chance?

Dr. Norman. It is not at all likely. More than that, it is impossible. They would have been reduced to impalpable powder in such a heat. These fragments exist through being protected to some degree by surrounding muscles.

* * * * *

James Biggs, ticket collector at Barstow Station, said:

Dr. Norman came to Barstow Station on the night of September 18th. He came in a trap driven by a woman—that one there (pointing to Martha Jecks). He took a ticket, and I punched it. I saw him get into a second-class compartment of the up train. I shut the door for him.

Dr. Eustace MacIvor, attending physician at Bethlehem Hospital, said:

Dr. Norman called upon me by appointment at ten o'clock, September 19th. After explaining that the object of his visit was to obtain from me a certificate of his wife's insanity, he said: 'I must get my wife into an asylum at once. She is beyond my control. I am certain that she meditates suicide. It is for my own sake, quite as much as

for hers, that I wish her removed; the danger is as great for me as for her. As frequently occurs in such cases, her friends will not believe in her insanity, but are fairly convinced that I am a diabolical villain. If my wife commits suicide, I shall be charged with having murdered her.' We arranged that I should examine Mrs. Norman next Monday, and our interview ended.

Mr. Grote. Were you acquainted with Dr. Norman previous to this meeting on the 19th of September?

Dr. MacIvor. Yes, we studied together at King's College.

Mr. Grote. You have Dr. Norman's letter appointing to meet you on the 19th?

Dr. MacIvor. Yes (the letter produced).

Mr. Griffiths (coroner). From the evidence of Dr. MacIvor, I conclude, Dr. Norman, that in your opinion Mrs. Norman herself fired the house?

Dr. Norman. No, sir, that is not my opinion. Martha Jecks declares that when she first discovered the fire the flames were issuing from the windows of the ground floor in the west wing, and were confined to that part. My wife's room is on the floor above. I had fastened the door before leaving, so that she could not possibly get out.

A Jurymen. There was no one else in the house; the fire broke out some four or five hours after you left it; if Mrs. Norman did not fire the house, who did?

Dr. Norman. That is a question for the police to inquire into. In my opinion a warrant should be issued at once for the apprehension of Thomas Peters.

The Coroner. Who is this Thomas Peters?

Dr. Norman. A lad employed by me as a laboratory assistant. He lived in my house for some months. I have reason to believe that he is a thief. He tampered with the locks of my private drawers, and attempted to rob Captain Valentine Bromley while staying at the Moat. I discharged him for aiding in the attempted abduction of Mrs. Norman. Subsequently he broke into my house. I found him in the passage leading to my room. I shot him. The wound, however, did not prevent him from making his escape. He got in by a window on the first floor, and escaped the same way. Up till that time the moat had been kept dry. I flooded it to prevent his entering that way again.

Mr. Griffiths. Notwithstanding your precautions, you believe that he did get into the house and set fire to it?

Dr. Norman. It was not at all necessary that he should get into the house to do that; although I have no doubt he could have done so had he wished. Whilst in my service he amused himself with carpentry in his spare moments. The refuse, chips, shavings, and what not, he kept in a room immediately under the rooms occupied by my wife and myself. This room was lighted by a casement looking on to the moat. It was left unglazed for the purpose of ventilation. On the outside it was protected by two or three iron bars. Anyone standing on the opposite side of the moat wall, which is twelve feet broad, could, with a little practice, succeed in throwing a stone with a lighted fusee attached to it into the room. I had overlooked this possibility, but it occurred to me the moment I learnt from Martha that she had first seen the flames coming through that casement.

Mr. Grote. You believe he was actuated by a spirit of revenge?

Dr. Norman. Yes, Mr. Grote (speaking with grave deliberation). But I shall not be surprised to find when the lad is examined that he was influenced by pecuniary considerations as well.

Mr. Grote. Does it not seem to you that the lad Peters, knowing that your relations with Mrs. Norman were of an unhappy kind, adopted a strange system of revenge in destroying Mrs. Norman as a means of punishing you?

A Juryman. Possibly he was not aware that Dr. Norman had left the house. It may have been his intention to destroy Dr. Norman, irrespective of the consequences upon Mrs. Norman.

Mr. Griffiths. I think it will be best to reserve questions until we have heard the whole of Dr. Norman's theory.

Dr. Norman. I will complete my theory in answering the objection made by Mr. Grote and the last speaker. It is my belief that Peters knew I was not in the house when he fired it. He has always shown himself on former occasions both cunning and careful. He would not commit an act of this kind at haphazard. He would proceed with deliberation. If he meant to destroy me, he would make sure that I was in the house to destroy. Even if he came down between the time of my leaving the house in the trap and the return of it, he could assure himself whether I was at home or not. He knows my habits. He could tell by

the absence of light in the laboratory and in the sitting-room that I was not there. I firmly believe that he saw me leave the house.

Now, with regard to Mr. Grote's question, I submit that there is nothing odd whatever in the mode of revenge adopted by Peters. The line taken by Mr. Grote in this examination indicates the theory entertained by my enemies; that theory is that I set fire to the house to get rid of my wife.

Had I gone to London by accident—had I not providentially written that letter of appointment to Dr. MacIvor, this inquiry would probably end in my being committed to take my trial for murder. Peters saw this chance of saddling me with a crime which I could scarcely rebut, and he availed himself of it.

Mr. Griffiths. That would imply that Peters was acquainted with the supposed feeling of your enemies, and the probable action they would take.

Dr. Norman. I believe that when we get Peters in a witness-box we shall be able to prove that such an acquaintance with the motives and intentions of the persons in question did absolutely exist, and has existed, from the moment he assisted Dr. Bullen in abducting my wife.

Mr. Griffiths. Have you any observations to make, Mr. Grote, upon this extraordinary statement?

Mr. Grote. No, sir. Whatever I have to say upon this subject must be reserved until we can get hold of Peters. It is a case purely hypothetical, and one that I think ought not to be entered into here.

I read this report through again and again, and many questions occurred to me which I wished to be answered, but I would not speak about it to Valentine after what had passed between us. I learnt, however, from my guardian some particulars which confirmed Dr. Norman's theory even in the opinion of Mr. Grote, the solicitor. Inquiries had been made, and it was found that Peters had been in the neighbourhood of Beauchamp Moat from the time of his discharge from Dr. Norman's service until the evening of the day on which the house was burnt down. Since then he had not been seen, and no trace of him could be found. It was thought he had seen the report which

appeared the day after the inquest, and had made his escape to avoid apprehension. 'If he were innocent,' Mr. Grote said, 'he would certainly have communicated with us, claiming reward for the service he rendered in getting the communication from Mrs. Norman.' But no message came from him, and it was believed he had gone to Liverpool and thence taken passage to America.

Mrs. Bromley was buried on the 24th. The weather was heavy, dull, and dispiriting.

'We must wait another week, dear,' said my husband, 'and then, if nothing occurs to prevent us, we will go where the sky is bright, and we may get rid of our morbid reflections.'

In the meantime he endeavoured to inspire me with cheerful thoughts and hopes for the future.

'When we come back it will be to begin a new life, and everything about us shall be new,' he said; and then we went to different places looking about for a house that would suit us. It did not matter where we settled, as neither he nor I had any friends.

'I think this will suit us,' said he, when we went to Chislehurst; 'the country is pretty, there are good people to know round about, and it is so near London that we can drive home after going to the theatre if we wish it.'

I quite agreed with him, and after a little looking about we found a delightful house standing in the midst of beautiful grounds upon the side of a hill. The view was not so grand or extensive as from the hills about Faulcondale, but there were many pretty houses to be seen peeping out from the trees, and it was pleasant to think that in every one of them might be a future friend.

The people we met were refined and graceful, and the children were simply lovely, so that in my heart I almost wished that our journey abroad was over, that we might begin to know our new neighbours. The house itself was the prettiest I have ever seen, with many high-pointed gables, little balconies outside the windows, and inside bright lively rooms, well lit, and a fine conservatory at the back, and all manner of queer little rooms and passages; besides a coach-house and stabling, where one might keep Coquelicot and half a dozen other horses.

Seeing how charmed I was with it, Valentine agreed to

take the house at once. The next day he instructed an agent to sell Fairlawn when we were gone; and after that we went together to a decorator in Oxford Street, who was commissioned to furnish the house completely. He undertook to have it ready by the last day in October. I sighed to think that a whole month and more must pass before I could see in our own house all the rich and beautiful things exhibited to us as we passed through the show-rooms of that wonderful shop in Oxford Street.

Then it was arranged that Esther Norton should engage all necessary servants and instal them at Woldhurst—that was the peculiar name of our house—and be in readiness to receive us about the second week in November.

We had no hesitation in trusting the house in Esther's hands, for though she was a young woman, she was extremely methodical and orderly. She had shown a strong attachment to Mrs. Bromley, and was more moved that one might have anticipated when she heard of the terrible fate of poor Mrs. Norman.

And so, all things being arranged, and Mr. Grote telling Valentine that there was not the slightest necessity for him to wait in London, as Peters was beyond doubt out of all reach, we bade good-bye to Professor Schlobach and started for Paris.

'You will see me at Christmas,' said the professor once more as the train started.

He was going to revisit Germany for the first time since I had been under his care.

'Good-bye till Christmas,' we answered, and then, as he quickly passed out of our sight, I leaned back nestling against my husband's shoulder, and when he pressed my hand and looked into my face, I saw that we were both thinking that now our real happiness was come.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE NARRATIVE OF DOROTHEA BROMLEY CONTINUED.

WE spent four days in Paris; then we went to Rome, and stayed there two days; thence we went to Venice, where we stayed a fortnight, and all that time I was so happy,

that I could think of nothing but the time present. Everything was so new, so wonderful, so lovely, that it surpassed all I had ever imagined; when for a moment the past returned to my remembrance, it seemed impossible that so short a time separated us from the lugubrious events which overclouded our wedding. It was just as I had felt when, waking up in my old home, with the sunlight streaming into the room, the blue sky unclouded, and the swallows twittering under the eaves, I recalled to mind vaguely some terrible dream that had occurred in the night.

From Venice we went to Nice. Despite the beauties of the bay, that place appeared less beautiful to me. Perhaps my eyes were satiated with such a long feast of colour, my mind less susceptible to impressions—I know not; but after being at Nice some three or four days, I found myself one day speculating about our future home at Woldhurst, and the people whose acquaintance we were to make.

We were sitting in the garden of the hotel. Seeing that my thoughts were far away, Valentine said:

‘Thinking you would like to go home, little one?’

I nodded, laughing and blushing at the same time, for I felt rather ashamed of myself for seeming discontented amid so much that was beautiful.

‘Well, we will start to-morrow,’ he said; ‘I dare say we shall get home in time for a London fog: that is something to look forward to.’

He still at times talked to me in that tone which had offended my dignity at our first meeting—the tone he might have adopted towards a child. It was natural to him to talk in that way; he never intended to assert his superiority. Nevertheless, I could never reconcile myself to it. I was over-sensitive.

The next day we left Nice and returned to Paris, arriving there on Saturday morning. On Monday evening, he telegraphed to Esther Norton saying that we should be home on Wednesday. We left Calais on the afternoon of Tuesday, the 28th of October.

It was cold, a fine misty rain was falling as we left the harbour; after we had been on deck a little, Valentine bade me go down into the cabin, and I stayed there until the stewardess came in and said we were at Dover.

I went up on deck. Valentine was at the head of the

steps, his ulster on, with the collar turned up. The mist had thickened into a fog; we could hear the voices of men on the quay without seeing them. There was a great deal of noise—sailors shouting as they bumped the luggage about, the hissing of the steam, the rattle of machinery, the hoarse hollow whistle of steamers.

‘Well, Doris,’ said Valentine, smiling, as he arranged a woollen wrap about my throat, ‘are you satisfied?’

‘Yes,’ I answered, ‘I am quite content. The cold and fog remind me how comfortable our rooms will be with the blinds drawn and firelight glowing upon our home.’

‘To-morrow, Doris, to-morrow,’ said he, pressing my arm to his side as I slipped it under his.

He had determined to stay at Dover that night, fearing the voyage might be rough, and I should be unfit to go on. I was so impatient to be in my home, that I would willingly have put up with the inconvenience of arriving at Woldhurst unexpectedly; but Valentine expressed his dislike of going into a home possibly unprepared to receive us, so I concealed my wishes.

Five or six persons were waiting outside the gangway. It was hard to distinguish what they were through the fog; but as we drew nearer, I saw that one was a woman, tall and slight. I fancied that she in carriage resembled Esther Norton, and I hoped it was she, come to tell us that the house was quite ready, if we chose to go home at once.

It was a piece of thoughtfulness and attention not inconsistent with the girl’s admirable character. But I was disappointed; she fell back as we drew nearer.

A hotel porter came forward as we passed the gangway, and touching his hat, said:

‘Warden, sir?’

‘Yes,’ replied Valentine, giving the parcel of rugs.

I turned round as Valentine spoke, and at the same time I saw the woman move away abruptly, and a moment after she was lost to my sight.

We dined, and then Valentine drew my chair before the fire, made me comfortable in it, and putting a book in my hand, told me he should leave me for an hour.

I was glad that he should leave me at times. I did not wish him to feel that he was tied to me, and must take me with him or stay with me always. I wanted him to see

that though I had been a foolish and jealous girl, I was now wiser and more reasonable. I kissed him, telling him I should be quite content to read the whole evening if he found amusement in the smoking or billiard room, and settled down to my book at once.

But before long my thoughts began to wander from the story, and letting the book drop on my knees, I gave myself up to reflecting on the past and speculating on the future. After awhile my ideas grew confused, and I fell asleep—that was when my imagination had taken to building pleasant castles in the air.

I know not how long I had been sleeping, when some noise outside the hotel awoke me.

Turning my head as I opened my eyes, I perceived that Valentine was seated near me. His eyes were upon me; the expression upon his face was grave and anxious.

‘I have been asleep,’ I said, sitting up quickly, and now wide awake. ‘What time is it?’

He looked at his watch and said it was half-past nine.

‘And have you been sitting here long?’ I asked regretfully.

‘No, only a few minutes,’ he replied.

I told him how I came to fall asleep.

‘Ah, you were thinking about the past and future,’ he said; ‘that is just what has been in my mind; I should like to know what your thoughts were, Doris—will you tell me?’

‘Yes,’ I said, holding out my hand. He drew his chair close to mine and took my hand in his, then I continued:

‘First of all, dear, I thought of our meeting, and the day when I first felt sure that you loved me. Then I thought of my jealousy, and the unhappiness it brought upon me. That was the most prominent event in my recollection. I am ashamed now, when I think how jealous I was of poor Mrs. Norman, how much more readily I believed in the charges made against you than in your loyalty and truth. I was not in my senses then, I could not have been. It is irrational, ridiculous!’

‘Jealousy is madness, I think,’ he replied; ‘no one can be rational under such influences.’

‘Perhaps so. But jealousy is inexcusable when in your heart you believe that the one you love is innocent.’

He regarded me earnestly, and asked me if I had felt jealous when my heart told me he was innocent.

I would not conceal the truth from him. I said : ' I am afraid I did. I believe that I was jealous of poor Edith—a little jealous—right up to the last.'

' That is what I thought,' he said gravely.

' But that is all past,' said I ; ' it can never happen so again.'

' Why not ?' he asked ; ' accident made you jealous of Edith ; accident might make you jealous of someone else.'

' No, no, no,' I answered, ' that cannot be, for I know you can give me no just cause for jealousy '

' But you have shown that jealousy exists without cause. You told me that you were jealous of Edith to the last.'

' On the eve of our marriage, did I know you as I know you now ?' I asked triumphantly, feeling that I had never loved him so dearly.

He looked into the fire thoughtfully for some seconds, and answered reflectively, as if responding to some mental question of his own rather than to my objection :

' A woman's nature does not alter in six or seven weeks.'

' You will see, dear, you will see,' I said confidently. ' I shall never again be jealous of you. I could not have fallen asleep so easily if I had not been sure of that.'

' You think that you cannot be again jealous because you believe that you have a fuller knowledge of my character. But what do you know now that you did not know before our marriage ?'

' Don't I know how you love me, how strong in principle you are, how free from even petty vices ?'

' Well ?' he said questioningly, as if I had not given sufficient reason.

' And do I not know how I love you—ten thousand times more than ever I loved you in the bygone time ?'

' Would you have been jealous if you had not loved me ?' he asked.

' No,' I answered.

' And being jealous with so much love, might you not be more jealous with a greater love ?'

' According to logic I should be, perhaps ; but I don't care for logic. It is quite enough that I am above suspecting you of infidelity.'

He shook his head, smiling a little at the same time because of my contempt for logic.

‘It is because you are more easily guided by sentiment than by logic that the danger exists,’ he said.

Neither of us spoke for some moments, for I was trying to realize why logic should have so much importance as he assigned to it, and then he said :

‘I should like to know what you would do, Doris, supposing that there were presented to you incontrovertible evidence of my perfidy.’

‘Do you mean if I was sure you were deceiving me—that you really loved another woman better than you loved me?’

‘Yes, that is what I mean.’

The idea was purely figurative, but the thought of his loving anyone else—of his deceiving me—obtained so strong a mastery over my imagination that I was stung to the quick—my whole frame shook, I clutched the arm of my chair with both hands, I felt a burning desire for revenge in my heart. I could not speak, I was beside myself, and turned round upon my husband fiercely; but at the sight of his anxious face the paroxysm passed—I realized my position. I saw before me the one man in all the world I loved, and in an instant overcome with remorse, and my whole heart yearning towards him with love, I stretched out my hands, silently beseeching his forgiveness. There was great pity in his eyes as he bent down to kiss me.

‘It takes longer than you think, love,’ he said, ‘for our natures to be remoulded.’

I laughed, yet with little mirth in my heart.

‘Why, don’t you see, dear,’ I cried; ‘don’t you see that the very sight of you now brings me to my senses?’

‘Yes, yes, I see all,’ he answered.

‘You *shall* see, you *shall* see,’ I repeated; ‘wait till the trial comes—if it is to come—and you shall find my faith strong beyond your expectation.’

He made no comment then, but leaning forward with his elbows on his knees, he looked at the ground in profound thought. For some time he remained in that attitude, then suddenly, with a long sigh, he straightened himself, and turning to me, he said, tenderly yet firmly :

‘The trial is at hand, Doris.’

Wonderingly I looked at him; he stopped, and turned his head away, as though he could not bring himself to break the news to me.

'Trial, dear?' I said, in astonishment. 'What trial?'

'The trial of your fortitude and forbearance, your love and faith.'

He stopped again.

'Why do you hesitate to tell me this?' I asked cheerfully. 'I ask for nothing better than to prove my love for you and my faith. I want to show you that I am no longer a wayward and foolish girl. Tell me what I have to bear, dear.'

'In the first place,' he said, speaking with effort, 'you must settle where you would like to live.'

'Are we not going to Woldhurst?' I asked.

'No; an accident has happened which makes it impossible you should live at Chislehurst.'

That was a terrible disappointment after the pleasant dreams I had indulged in. But I said to myself, 'It is a trial to prove my love, and if that is all I have to bear it is but a small price to pay for my husband's respect.' Still, I was curious to know why I was not to live at Chislehurst, and I asked Valentine what accident it was that had happened.

'I cannot tell you, and you must not ask me,' he replied.

I was more and more astonished, for Valentine was by nature open and frank, disliking reticence and anything like concealment. It was foreign to his disposition to clothe his actions in mystery; as readily would he have arrayed himself in a long cloak and a slouched hat had he been a real conspirator.

'All this dramatic mystery perplexes you,' he said.

'Yes,' I replied.

'I am perplexed also,' he said; 'perplexed to know what to do for the best in this emergency. I have chosen this course because it is the lesser of two evils. You must bring yourself to understand that I am doing that which is best for your peace of mind and happiness.'

'I am sure of that now,' said I.

'Then the difficulty is lightened considerably. I am not a Blue Beard, but there is a secret chamber that I wish you to avoid—that is the house at Chislehurst. If you can repress your curiosity, all will go well. You shall live where you like; for my own part, I think London will be the pleasantest place at this time of year.'

'I will live in London,' I said.

'Good; to-morrow we will find a pleasant home for you.'

'For *us*,' I said, startled by a sudden fear.

'Yes,' he replied, with some hesitation, 'for *us*. But I may have to leave you frequently.'

'I wish you to leave me at times. I do not wish to tie you to my apron-strings. You must feel that I am not a clog upon your actions. If you wish to go out alone for a whole day——'

'I may have to leave you for several days at a time.'

My heart fell, a chill seemed to creep over me.

'Cannot you tell me why you leave me when you go?' I asked.

'No, I cannot tell you.'

I sat silent with amazement. I saw that he watched the expression of my face intently. I believe he made this proposal tentatively—that two courses lay open to him, and that he had resolved to abandon the one he had taken if he saw that I had not the moral courage to accept the trial presented. That last thought awoke my spirit.

'Is that all the demand you will make upon my faith and fortitude?' I asked.

'Yes; that is all that I can foresee.'

'Then,' said I, rising quickly from the chair, 'I will accept this trial.'

'You feel sure of yourself, Doris?' he asked.

'Yes,' I answered. 'I have courage and strength to prove my love for you. Do not doubt me. It would be cruel now to ask me to forego the trial.'

He embraced me, and presently left the room.

I have not written all that he said, or all my replies; but this is the substance of what passed between us on this strange occasion.

When he was gone, I paced the room, trying to realize my true position. It was so extraordinary, that for some time my mind refused to accept the facts as reality; it was like some strange problem which takes time to grasp and comprehend. Of one thing I felt certain; it was not a romantic trial of my affection and faith he proposed, like that to which Patient Griselda was so cruelly submitted. I knew that Valentine loved me too well to indulge a freak of that kind, even if it had been in his nature to demand a test of my love.

The idea of such a trial had been suggested by the conversation preceding the announcement that I could not live at Chislehurst, and he had encouraged that view of it to reconcile me to the strangeness of his proposal.

Unintentionally I went to the window and looked out. It was dreary indeed out there in the road. A little breeze had sprung up; one could see the fog moving under the flickering lights of the gas-lamps in front of the hotel.

I was about to turn away, when I saw Valentine pass under the lamp. I knew it was he. He stopped, and turned round. The next moment a woman came quickly to his side—a tall, slight young woman, she I had seen on the quay when we landed. I could not see her face. As she came to his side he walked on, his hands in his pockets, and she beside him. I was convinced the woman was Esther Norton, and that through her Valentine had been apprised of the mysterious ‘accident’ which prevented our going to Chislehurst.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE NARRATIVE OF DOROTHEA BROMLEY CONTINUED.

I DID cry a little silently in the night, but happily I fell asleep, and forgot my disappointment, and the next morning I woke up with revived courage. I tried to appear bright and cheerful, without seeming to force myself. But both Valentine and I were constrained to some degree. That was only natural. As we were going to London in the train, Valentine showed me two or three advertisements of houses to let furnished, and put a pencil mark against them. What greatly delighted me was to see that he marked one which was to let for six months only; that seemed to put a term upon the endurance which we had to undergo. I liked that advertisement better than any, and at my desire we drove straight from the station to Kensington, where the house was situated.

We found Mr. Percival, the proprietor, at home. He was an artist. He had built the house himself, and furnished it in the strangest manner conceivable; but it was all very quaint, original, and pretty, and not too large. I liked it

exceedingly—especially when I reflected that I could not live there more than six months. Oddly enough, the artist was going to the very place we had left, Venice, where he intended to stay until the end of March. He said he should be glad to go away at once, and was only waiting to get the house off his hands. This was just what Valentine required; and when he saw that I was quite satisfied, he accepted the artist's terms, and arrangements were made with regard to the servants, who were to be left for our service.

Valentine said nothing about Esther Norton and the servants at Woldhurst, and I did not question him about them. I had made up my mind not to mention anything connected with the house at Chislehurst, feeling sure that he had sufficient reason for avoiding that subject.

We stayed at the Langham Hotel during the few days required by Mr. Percival for final arrangements before departure. Valentine did not leave me for any prolonged time. He asked me for Mr. Schlobach's address, saying he wished to let the professor know where to find us when he returned to England.

The same afternoon he said to me :

'Wouldn't it be well to ask Miss Trevor to come and spend a week or two with you in London, Doris?'

Knowing what was passing in his mind when he made this suggestion, I replied that it was not at all necessary, and that I was not afraid of being left alone in the new house.

'As you will, dear,' he said; 'still, I think it would be agreeable to have one of your own sex to chat with sometimes. There are plenty of spare rooms in Warburton Villa.'

'If you think it is advisable, that is enough, dear,' I replied; 'I will write this afternoon.'

'Do,' he said, kissing my forehead, clearly gratified by my yielding.

This was the only reference he made to our future separation.

On November the first we took possession of Warburton Villa. There was a great deal to amuse and interest me in the house: every nook and corner contained some art treasure that called for admiration, and it took some time to learn one's way from the drawing-room up to the smoking-

room, from the library down to the dining-room, and to know where the things necessary for domestic use were kept.

The servants were capable and quick; they were pleased with the change, and seemed to like me, obeying me with great alacrity and doing their utmost to please. All that was very nice; my mind was completely occupied the whole day. Yet at night, before I fell asleep—the time when I generally think, when there is anything to think about—I felt strangely dissatisfied, and, seeking to explain my dissatisfaction, I came to the conclusion that it arose from nothing but covetousness.

‘If this house were really ours, and the servants our servants, and the linen and plate ours, and all the nicknacks and pictures belonged to us, then indeed I should be quite happy,’ I said to myself.

It seemed to my mind that, after all, this house was not more ours than the rooms in a hotel; and hence my discontent, which was unreasonable enough, I dare say.

The next day was bright and fine. Just after lunch, hearing the sound of wheels in the road, Valentine looked at his watch and strolled to the window.

‘Come here, Doris; there is something to see,’ he said.

I went to his side, and, looking out, saw standing before the door a charming pony-carriage: a *petit Duc*, with two beautiful dappled-gray ponies, a smart boy, dressed in the neatest of liveries, stationed with his arms folded on his chest before them.

I made some exclamation of delight. Valentine laughed at my ecstasies, and then said that since I liked the equipage so much I should have it.

‘Is it mine?’ I cried, clapping my hands; and then my delight subsiding several degrees, I added, ‘Oh yes, I understand; you have hired it for me with the house.’

‘No, it is yours altogether—tiger and all—for you to keep until the springs wear out and the tiger grows too stout for the back seat. You have yet to see whether the ponies go fast enough to please you. Drive me through the Park, and if you are satisfied by the time we get to Aldridge’s, I will give him a cheque, and you shall have the receipt to be sure the ponies are your very own.’

I was too pleased to take notice of his badinage except by a hearty kiss, and I ran upstairs to dress for the drive.

Valentine must have said to himself, seeing me so excited about a matter of such slight importance :

‘She is still a child. When she is a woman it will be time enough to trust her with a woman’s secrets.’

I ran down quickly, and we went out to the carriage ; but, before stepping in, I patted the ponies and admired their sleek coats, their slender legs, and pretty heads. The tiger touched his hat respectfully and told me their names. He said they went admirably in the carriage, although it was new to them, and added :

‘I hope, ma’am, if the little lot suits you, as you’ll be able to take me into your service. I’ve lived with the ponies for two years, and I should be sorry to be parted from ’em, and I’ve a good character from my last master.’

I promised I would engage him if the ponies pleased me, and took my seat ; and Thomas swung himself into the little seat behind as the ponies dashed off.

I had to hold the reins tight with the ponies ; they were not like poor old Coquelicot. The difficulty was to prevent them from going too fast. It was delightful to drive them, the more so because of the danger. When we got into Piccadilly and the crowded streets, my blood ran quicker and my spirits rose. I was very much excited.

‘Turn to the left—mind the cab—hey, that was a narrow shave !’ said Valentine, almost as excited as I was. ‘That is Aldridge’s on the left ; put up there ; that’s it ; now what am I to say : that you will have “the little lot,” as Thomas calls it ?’

‘Oh yes, yes !’ I answered.

Then he went into the office, and, coming out soon afterwards, put the receipt into my hand, laughing.

On our way back we stopped at one or two shops in Piccadilly, where we bought flowers and fruit and some things that the cook had asked for, and I own I felt not a little vain of the attention we excited. Everyone seemed to be regarding us.

‘It is not every woman who has such a handsome husband as Valentine by her side, nor such an elegant equipage,’ I said to myself.

At the same moment that we arrived at Warburton Villa, the postman came up. He handed two letters to Valentine, who opened them while the housemaid was taking from me the things we had purchased.

Valentine put the letters in his pocket and looked sombrely at the ground for a moment, his brows knitted; then, turning to me, as I was about to step down from the carriage, he said:

‘Are you too tired to take me to Victoria?’

‘No,’ I answered, but with less joy in my voice than I should have felt had the prospect been different. I knew instinctively that I was not to bring him back from Victoria.

He took his seat beside me, and once more the ponies dashed off; but I drove them mechanically and without pleasure now, for my thoughts were elsewhere.

‘I must leave you, dearest, at Victoria,’ he said in a low tone, when we had gone some distance.

‘Yes, dear,’ I answered, with as much courage as I could muster.

‘I shall certainly not return to-night, perhaps not to-morrow. That doesn’t seem to you very terrible?’

‘No, dear; you have prepared me for a separation of this kind. But you will come back to me soon?’

He pressed my hand, which I had slipped down by his side, and held it for a moment clasped in his, but without speaking. It was unnecessary to say ‘yes’ to such a needless question.

‘I will let you know when I shall return,’ he said, releasing my hand, ‘so that you may come to meet me at Victoria.’

That was a pleasure to think of; and it came just in time, for my heart had been giving way and I felt that the tears were rising.

‘Oh, how I shall long for a message!’ I said.

I did not know the road, and I had to take directions from Thomas—‘now to the right, ‘m—across the square, ‘m—fust on the left, ‘m,’ and the like, so that I found myself at Victoria before I was aware of it, by which means we were spared the pain of a tedious parting.

Valentine pressed my hand and passed quickly into the crowded booking-office, and I had nothing then to do but to turn my ponies round and go home—alone.

Alone! alone! That is a dreadful word for a young wife to repeat to herself. It filled me with an indescribable sense of desolation, chasing all the gaiety from my heart and damping my spirits effectually.

On my way home I found myself wondering whether

Valentine, seeing me in such good spirits, had thought this a favourable opportunity for leaving me; and following this train of thought, which was not without a tinge of bitterness, I asked myself whether he had given me this equipage to reconcile me to the separation—as one buys a toy for a crying child.

‘I would never have accepted his gift had I thought that,’ I said to myself.

The suspicion was unjust—I am ashamed to record it; but it is necessary I should dwell upon these trifles to show how distrust, like an insidious disease, lay ready for development in my disposition.

As I turned into the road at the end of which our house stood, I saw at some distance a broad-shouldered gentleman, in a long Inverness cape and a broad-brimmed felt hat, pacing slowly along the footpath with his hands folded behind him. It was my dear old professor; I recognised him at once. Hearing the sound of wheels he faced about, and even at that distance I saw his face beam with a broad smile as he identified me, raising his fat hands at the same time.

He took me in his arms and held me close to him, saying ‘My shild—my shild,’ over and over again; if the street had been full of people, and all looking at us, it would have made no difference to him.

They had told him in the house that I had gone out in the carriage with my husband, and he had been waiting for me about twenty minutes.

‘Valentine sent me a telegram saying where you were living, and that you would be glad to see me as soon as I returned to England,’ he said, when we were seated indoors, ‘and I just said good-bye to my old friends and came away, for you are still my child, and there is nothing in the world so dear to me.’

‘And you will stay with us and we will be very happy,’ I said; ‘you shall see the room I have prepared for you.’

‘Yes, I will stay with you a little time; but,’ he added, lowering his voice, ‘I know that when two young people are married they like to be by themselves;’ and he laughed heartily, but stopped abruptly to draw me towards him and kiss me again.

‘And where is Valentine?’ he asked, after that.

'He—he did not come back with me,' I said, rather foolishly. That was obvious, but I did not know what else to say.

'Well, well, all in good time; I shall see him this evening.'

'No, he will not come back to-day; he is going to stay away a little while.'

'Going to stay away a little while!' repeated the professor, his eyes growing round with astonishment. 'What, there is someone ill?'

'No,' I said, greatly embarrassed, without knowing why.

'Then what is the matter?'

'I do not know.'

'But where is he gone?'

'I do not know,' I repeated.

'Your husband has gone away, and he has not told you where or why or anything?' he asked, still in great astonishment.

'No; there are things which men cannot tell their wives—things they could not understand quite if they were told, and in that case it is wise for men to be silent.'

The professor was not moved in the least by this argument; he continued to look at me in blank amazement.

'Oh, if it were worth the trouble,' I continued, 'I could find many reasons why Valentine should go away like this.'

'I wish you would take the trouble to find one, then, my dear, for I can't understand these things at all.'

'Why, there is business,' I said, taxing my imagination as I spoke: 'Valentine was a soldier, you know. His absence may have something to do with the army. He may be ordered to join his regiment again, or something of that kind, and he would naturally think it would frighten me to know that his life would again be exposed——' I stopped, dreading lest my own suggestion might prove correct.

'Can you think of any other reason?' asked my guardian, still incredulous.

'Why, it might be that some old family friends had come to live at Chislehurst while we were away. Rich, grand people, you know, who might be unfavourably disposed towards me. I being so unused to society, and ignorant of their ways, Valentine would wish to spare me such humiliation—and—and——'

I could go no farther, for I felt that if that theory were correct, Valentine must love me less than his fine friends, and that thought pierced my heart like a knife.

Seeing me in pain, the professor's demeanour changed at once. He had been walking softly to and fro, his hands behind him, his eyes on the ground, and his head held a little sideways to catch what I said. As I paused, he stopped before me, and laying his hand gently on my head, he cried :

'What does it matter, my child, whether it is for this reason or for that he does these things? It is stupid of me to ask. You know that your husband loves you, and if he loves you it is sure that whatever he does is the very best he can do for your happiness.'

'Yes,' I answered joyfully; 'it must be so, mustn't it?'

'Of course it must. And would he deserve your love or respect or anything else if he told you what he felt he ought not to tell you? No, he wouldn't be a man if he did that!'

'Oh, that is quite true. And Valentine is all that a strong man should be,' I cried, more and more delighted—so quick were the transitions of feeling.

'We have known that from the first day we knew him. It is all right. He may be very busy—he may have fine friends—he may leave you for two or three days—all these things are nothing; if he loves you it is everything!'

'Yes, that is everything,' I said.

Nevertheless, I was not happy when I fell asleep that night.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE NARRATIVE OF DOROTHEA BROMLEY CONTINUED.

THE next evening I received a message from my dear husband, in which he told me to meet him at Victoria. I cannot describe my joy. The thought of seeing the beloved face once more, and so soon, cleared every gloomy thought and care out of my mind.

Yes, I was still a child.

And the professor, seeing me so delighted, was scarcely

less happy than I. He rubbed his fat hands, and said to me again and again, 'He loves you, and that is everything.' How true that was, I thought, and how really wise he was! I loved him for being so; indeed, I felt that I loved the whole world.

I took myself to task for having been despondent, and for my want of patience; but it seems to me that even the wisest of us is unreasonably influenced by present circumstances, and that wisdom cannot make us indifferent, for even the professor was different that day to what he had been the day before. His gaiety was not forced; he sang little catches of old German student songs instead of humming tunelessly.

When the cook came to consult me about the culinary arrangements for the day, I told her that her master would be home to lunch, and that she was to get the very nicest repast she could possibly imagine; and from her manner it was clear that she intended to surpass herself. The enthusiasm was infectious. I took care that everything should be in its place, and all as orderly and neat as possible, and I got to Victoria half an hour before the time. But that was no trouble to me. And then when a train came in pouring out a stream of passengers, and I caught sight of Valentine, I could not restrain myself, but, pushing my way through the throng, I met him, caught his dear hands in mine, and kissed him, not at all minding the smiles of those who saw me.

It was quite early in the morning; we encountered a body of soldiers—the Guards marching from St. James's, Valentine said. Their band was playing spirited music; my heart was in tune with it. I remember the air they played now, and it recalls the intense joy of that moment.

I drove past Buckingham Palace, and there being but few people between there and Piccadilly, I could give my husband's hand a furtive pinch now and then, and the pressure of his hand in response sent a thrill through my veins.

'Shall we go straight home?' I asked.

'No, let us have a good long drive, Doris; it does one good,' he answered.

So instead of turning to the left, I drove to the right.

'We will walk through the Arcade and look at the shops,' said Valentine, as we approached Burlington House.

I drew up. Thomas jumped down and held the ponies, and Valentine gave me his hand to alight. We walked through the Arcade, stopping to admire the bright things in the shop windows. There was a diamond bracelet that struck me as being very beautiful. Valentine also admired it, and without another thought he took me into the shop and bought it, paying I don't know how many pounds for it.

'Now, I am longing to put it on your arm,' he whispered, as we went out.

'Shall we go home at once?' I asked, blushing, for I longed to twine my arms about his neck.

He nodded, and, laughing at our inconsistency, we walked to the carriage, and I turned the horses round and drove rapidly home.

The professor had gone out. I was glad of that. And when we were alone in the drawing-room, and he put the bracelet on my wrist, he kissed my arm passionately, and with a cry of joy I snatched my arm away, flung both round his neck, and pressed my lips to his. Our love was like a stream that rushes on fuller and more impetuously through being stemmed for a time.

I remembered everything that happened that day. I could write a great deal about it. But it is not necessary here: I have said so much to show the state of our feelings towards each other at that time.

The next day was scarcely less happy. But in the afternoon I said to him:

'You see, dear, I am none the worse for being alone a day or two. You need have no fear in leaving me next time. I shall always know you love me, and,' I added, thinking of what the professor said, 'that is everything.'

'You make it less painful to part, dear one,' he said; 'to-morrow I must leave you again.'

'Very well, dear love,' I said, feeling that this time I could bear it better than the last.

After dinner Valentine and the professor sat together in the smoking-room. I dare say my guardian tried to find out why he must go away without me; but I am sure he learnt nothing; for in the first place, if Valentine thought it unwise to enlighten me, he would certainly think it unwise to let the professor into the secret; and secondly, if he had done so, the professor would have told me all

about it before twelve hours had gone by; for he had this weakness, he could conceal nothing.

The next morning I took Valentine again to Victoria, but instead of parting abruptly, he took me on the platform with him, and stood with me by the carriage door until the guard said, 'Sevenoaks train, sir, going on.' Then he embraced me, and we parted with smiles.

I was very pleased. It was now no secret that he was going to Chislehurst. That showed that he had more confidence in me.

I was not unhappy in returning home. I thought that by degrees Valentine would break the secret to me. And it was not because I was inquisitive that I wished him to do so, but solely for the sake of being found brave, and deserving of his full confidence, which up to this time I certainly had not been.

I determined I would do nothing to shake his confidence nor hasten him to reveal the fact to me. All would come in good time, I said to myself. I could not help speculating on the nature of the secret; that was only natural. When I had suggested to my guardian that possibly some former friends of Valentine's had come to live at Chislehurst, and that to spare me humiliation he had thought it advisable to keep me away until they left, I had not believed in the possibility of any such thing. Indeed, I had felt indignant at my own supposition, which seemed to reflect false shame upon my husband. But now that I was in a more reasonable frame of mind, the theory did not seem to me so impossible. I reflected that I was in many ways uncultivated and unfit to take my place among people of society, as they are called. I saw that my ignorance of polite usages would certainly submit me to much mortification. I should commit solecisms, make myself ridiculous, and suffer intensely in consequence.

I had no sooner come to this conclusion than I said to myself, 'Why should I not occupy myself during Valentine's absence in supplying the deficiencies in my education? Why should I not place myself on an equality in this respect with the people I must mingle with, and learn something instead of idling away my time?' Here was a way of shortening our period of forced separation, and rendering it unnecessary, perhaps. Of course, my supposition might be

a false one, but the possibility of it being correct was a quite sufficient inducement to make the preparation. Besides, it could do me no harm, but, on the contrary, much good, to learn the ordinary accomplishments of a lady; and also it would give me something to think of, and prevent me fostering foolish and wrong fancies.

This notion gave me great satisfaction, and I set about at once to put my scheme into execution.

There was a fine piano at Warburton Villa, and Valentine had said to me once:

‘It is a pity you do not play, Doris; you might have found a great deal of enjoyment in music.’

I got the *Times* newspaper, and going through the advertisements of musical professors willing to give lessons, and choosing the one I thought best, I wrote, asking the musician to call upon me as soon as he could. Then I turned once more to the advertisement sheet, and found that a gentleman who had the honour to instruct the nobility and gentry in dancing and deportment was prepared to give private instruction to ladies and gentlemen at their own residences. I wrote to him. And the very next day the musician, who was a very amiable lady, named Miss Jacobs, and the dancing-master, Signor Alboni, an elderly, but very agile, little gentleman, with the most elegant manners conceivable—called upon me, and we came to terms with the utmost facility. We lost no time, and before the next welcome message from Valentine came to tell me of his return, I had taken my first lessons.

In making that arrangement I had consulted with Professor Schlobach, but without telling him the exact reason why I wished to learn music and dancing, and he had agreed with me that it would be a good thing to do. I was curious, though, to know how Valentine would receive the news of my new occupation. I was not certain whether he would treat it seriously, or whether he would look upon it as a childish caprice and laugh at me. That I dreaded. And so it was with hesitation, and in a roundabout way, that I told him what I had done as we were driving from the station.

‘Learning music, and dancing, too!’ he exclaimed.

‘Yes, dear,’ I answered. ‘I—I want to be like other women in our rank of life.’

He looked at me, with emotion visible on his fine face, and then he said:

‘If other women could only make themselves like you, my darling!’

One can imagine how my heart was transported with joy to hear him say this. That was encouragement to make anyone persevere in overcoming the difficulties of Czerny’s exercises.

It is needless to dwell on our occasional separations. One was very much like another—except to me. I found diversity in them. Each time I met Valentine after a separation I said to myself that I had never loved him so well, and the next time it always seemed that I loved him more. It was an absorbing passion. He was ever present in my mind, no matter what I did. Trifling acts of everyday life were regulated with a consideration of his views respecting them. Oh, the joy with which I looked forward to his coming, the clinging tenderness when we were together, and the delight of being within hand’s touch of him—a delight rendered more strenuous by the hidden pain of presently parting! I had loved him dearly before we were married, but that love was nothing compared with the complete and adoring passion I now felt. No; a woman’s life does not begin until she is married, and I have often thought that those who write romances are blind to nature to make their stories end on the day of a girl’s marriage, leaving off just when the real interest of life begins.

My love was returned. I felt that, or I could not have been so completely happy. I should have been more exacting. I should have sought an explanation of the thing he persistently kept secret. The old jealous doubtings would have risen in my mind had I not felt that. My professor had given me a talisman to conjure with: it was that phrase of his, ‘If he loves you, that is everything.’

He took pleasure in my beauty, and was never weary of buying presents that he thought would suit me. I myself needed little encouragement that way. I had a lively appreciation for the beauty of diamonds, and it gave me great happiness to adorn myself for the delight of my husband, and to enjoy his admiration. ‘Are you pleased with me, dear?’ I would ask. And his glowing kisses told me that none of his fine friends outshone me.

In his absence I worked really hard at music, practising for four or five hours a day at the piano, besides taking my

lessons of Signor Alboni. My lessons in dancing and deportment were no task at all. I found it the easiest thing in the world to move as he bade me, and I said to myself that when the time came for me to go into society, and be taken to balls, my husband would not find me heavy or awkward, or be ashamed of me. I used to dream of dancing with him.

Yes, I worked hard during Valentine's absence—it was necessary; otherwise I should have made no progress at all; for when he was at home I took no lessons, and did not touch the piano. I gave myself up to love. I begrudged every moment that took me from his side, and was jealous of the professor when he had Valentine to himself in the smoking-room.

A day or two after Mr. Schlobach's coming to us, Miss Trevor arrived, in answer to my invitation, and from that time resided with me. She had friends and relatives in Kensington, and somehow there was always a niece or a cousin to visit on those days when Valentine was with me. The professor also found excuses to be absent at these times, though never without apologies. I think there was some sort of understanding between the dear old people. They saw that we wanted to be alone—or that at least I did.

Miss Trevor was very companionable and chatty. She had a long memory, and was never at a loss for a subject of conversation. Amongst other things, she told me that soon after her return to Faulcondale Mr. Everleigh had called upon her, and asked very kindly after me.

'I told him that you were married, dear,' she said, 'and of the terrible events that happened at that time. I also informed him that I was going to stay with you in London. He said he should like to make the acquaintance of Captain Bromley, and I gave him your address; I hope I did not do wrong?'

'Oh no,' I exclaimed, 'I should like to see Mr. Everleigh again. Do you think he will call upon us?'

CHAPTER XXV

THE NARRATIVE OF DOROTHEA BROMLEY CONTINUED.

STRANGELY enough, the very next day I met Mr. Everleigh. That was on Sunday, the 14th of November. The afternoon,

though dull, was clear and dry, and I took my favourite drive through the Park with the professor for a companion. We were returning through Park Lane when a gentleman crossed the road at some distance before us.

Hearing the approaching wheels, he turned his head, and I perceived at once that it was Mr. Everleigh. He did not seem to recognise me, however, until I drew in by the pavement near him.

'Mrs. Bromley!' he exclaimed, taking off his hat, and offering his hand. 'Pardon me—I must be shortsighted indeed not to have seen you.'

He shook hands with Mr. Schlobach, and stood by the carriage with us for some minutes.

'I shall give myself the pleasure of calling upon you, Mrs. Bromley,' he said, 'at a proper season.'

This was just in keeping with his nice observance of conventional formalities. I laughed, and told him I thought every season was proper for friends to see each other, and added that I was sure my husband would be as glad as I to see him at Warburton Villa.

'In that case I shall take a very early occasion to call. At what hour am I most likely to find Captain Bromley at home?'

Valentine had told me before going away that he should return on Monday morning.

'We shall be at home to-morrow afternoon,' I said.

'To-morrow afternoon, then, I hope to have the pleasure of making Captain Bromley's acquaintance.'

We shook hands, and I drove off, feeling proud that he should see my equipage with the spirited ponies, and looking forward with satisfaction to his visit, in order that he might see how fortunate I was in having such a husband as Valentine. If I had possessed broader views, a more generous spirit, I should have said to myself:

'My husband's happiness will be a source of chagrin to this friend; the sight of my prosperity will provoke the cruel reflection that I have done well in not marrying him. This is an unfair return to him for having offered to make me his wife when I was less fortunate.'

But no such thoughts entered my vain head at that time.

I told Valentine when we met of the visit we were to receive, and made fun of Mr. Everleigh with his pragmatic ways and near sight. Valentine laughed.

'We must keep the professor at home to talk to him,' he said, 'for I know nothing about cockroaches.'

I took great pains with my toilet, in view of my mean little triumph; but I was properly punished. Mr. Everleigh did not come.

We saw nothing of him during the week, but on the following Monday he called, and then Valentine was absent, having left London on Sunday.

I was taking my music lesson when the servant brought me his card. I found him in conversation with Miss Trevor, upon going into the reception-room.

'I owe you many apologies, Mrs. Bromley,' he said. 'Miss Trevor tells me you stayed at home last Monday to receive me. Had I known that, I should have sent to tell you of the obstacle that prevented me giving myself the pleasure of a visit. I concluded that Monday was your day for receiving visits, and——'

I begged him not to apologize, and added that I was very sorry my husband happened to be away from home just then, speaking as if it were the merest accident in the world, for I did not wish him to know that Valentine was frequently absent.

'It is a pleasure postponed,' said he. 'I am very anxious to know Captain Bromley, and I shall seek an occasion of making his acquaintance, even at the risk of making myself troublesome. That does not astonish you, Mrs. Bromley?'

'No,' I replied; 'all that concerns our friends should interest us.'

'Yes; but there is another reason. A man forms a conception of individuals before seeing them by the mere association of ideas, and as his conception is favourable or the reverse, he seeks to know those persons intimately, or avoids them altogether. That is why I wish particularly to make a friend of Captain Bromley.'

I was pleased with this compliment to my husband.

'Pardon me,' he said, rising and approaching a picture on the wall, 'that is a sketch of Leighton's, unless I am mistaken.'

'Yes, and this is a real Meissonier,' I replied, going further along to point out a tiny panel, on the extraordinary merits of which Mr. Percival had dwelt in showing us the house.

Mr. Everleigh had to bring his face within a few inches of the picture to see it thoroughly; still scanning it, he said :

‘I am not mistaken ; Captain Bromley is an artist.’

‘Oh no,’ said I, laughing ; ‘he is a soldier—a cavalry officer.’

‘I have heard that ; it is his artistic taste I refer to ; without that, even a successful painter is not an artist.’

‘Then I am sure my husband is an artist, for all his tastes are good,’ I said confidently.

He inclined his head in acquiescence, and proceeded to examine the line of pictures, making comments upon them which seemed to me very just and astute. Meanwhile, Miss Trevor put on her glasses, and resumed her embroidery by the window.

At the other end of the room was a portfolio of engravings on a stand.

‘Etchings !’ said Mr. Everleigh. ‘Will you allow me to look at them ?’

He placed a chair for me, and seated himself by the portfolio.

‘It must have taken a long while to form such a magnificent collection,’ he said, after expatiating on the merits of the etchings.

‘Yes, a long while,’ said I.

If he had introduced Valentine’s name I must have told the truth out, and let him know that the collection had come into his hands in something less than an hour ; but I did not wish to destroy Mr. Everleigh’s good opinion of Valentine, nor did I wish to let him know that we were only staying in the house temporarily. That would have involved an explanation which my vanity shrank from. I had not hinted even to Miss Trevor that this was not our real home.

‘How fond a man must be of a home, having furnished it in this way,’ he said, ‘surrounding himself with refining treasures that keep his mind pure and noble ! Each of these beautiful works is a rivet in the golden chain that keeps him a willing prisoner to his own fireside. A wife’s surest happiness lies in her husband’s affection for his home. An idle man, with no strong interest of this kind, is inevitably tempted to seek variety abroad ; and there,’ he

added, with a sigh, 'is the beginning of the greatest misery which can befall him and the one whose fate is linked to his.'

I knew that he meant to felicitate me upon my lot, and render homage to Valentine, but his words inspired me with uneasiness.

'I knew a poor wretch who attributed all his misery—the loss of a wife who died with a broken heart, the degradation of his children, his own moral and physical ruin—simply to the fact that he had never made a home for his wife before he married. That is the solemn duty, as it seems to me, of every man. I believe that all the unhappiness of Parisian home life—indifference, neglect, infidelity—arises from the vicious disregard of the home. It is significant that they have no equivalent for that beautiful word "home." I congratulate you, Mrs. Bromley, on having a husband, whose tastes assure your happiness.'

I felt excessively uncomfortable. I did not know what reply to make.

'You—you have a very high esteem for the love of art?' I stammered.

He was looking closely at a print; he passed it to me, pointing to the legend below.

The picture represented a villainous rascal scowling over his shoulder at a young musician; underneath was written: 'The man that hath no music in himself is fit for treasons, stratagems, and spoils let no such man be trusted.'

'If "art" were substituted for "music" the quotation would be not less true,' said Mr. Everleigh, closing the portfolio and rising.

We joined Miss Trevor, and he told her about his journey to Algeria—the country—the people—the specimens of flies he had collected, which he wished to show Mr. Schlobach, and other things. Miss Trevor happily sustained the conversation; I could not take any interest in his description, although I dare say it would have amused me at another time. What he had said about the home, and its influence upon men, was echoing in my mind, and I could not rid myself of the uncomfortable impression his words made. And then I asked myself whether he was quite right about art: whether a man could not be good

and loving and free from base designs, and yet have no artistic taste in his soul. Mr. Schlobach's eulogies upon Mr. Everleigh's sound sense, and my own ignorance upon serious matters, had led me to entertain the highest opinion of his judgment; but I was forced to doubt his accuracy now, because he certainly took greater interest in the pictures than ever Valentine had shown, and I could not allow that Valentine was less worthy than he.

The more I thought about these things the less I liked them, and the more abstracted I became. So, out of politeness to my visitor, I resolved to lay aside my reflections and attend to what was being talked about.

'Yes, my poor brother lies there,' Mr. Everleigh was saying, 'the second who has died of consumption, besides a sister. We are but two now.'

'You have another brother?' asked Miss Trevor.

'No; I have a sister. Poor girl! she might envy the sister that is gone.'

I wondered what the cause of the trouble might be, but Mr. Everleigh spoke in a tone of such deep regret that I felt it would be cruel to probe his wound. Miss Trevor, however, had no such compunction, or her curiosity overcame it.

'Is your sister very ill, sir?' she asked.

'No; on the contrary, she enjoys perfect health at present.'

'She is single, I suppose?' Miss Trevor said tentatively.

'No; I would she were, Miss Trevor,' he replied; 'she married while I was in Algeria. It was a secret marriage. I knew nothing about it until she had made the fatal step. She is quite a young girl; her husband is a middle-aged man, with just enough money to enable him to lead an idle life. I had a slight acquaintance with him; my sister and I met him occasionally at the house of a friend. We were never intimate, although he endeavoured to make himself agreeable to me. There was something in him I did not like. He was what is called a man of the world, and he did not seem to me to be a man of high principle. It was because of my dislike that my sister concealed her affection for him from me, and finally married him clandestinely. When I came home from Algeria, I found Kate living in furnished apartments at Highgate. It was a good house,

furnished with some pretension to style. There was nothing to complain of in that respect. Still, it was not a home as wives regard it.'

'Ah! a home is very necessary to the happiness of married people,' said Miss Trevor.

'That is exactly what I have been saying to Mrs. Bromley. My sister was alone. Naturally my first inquiry was for her husband. He was out, she told me with hesitation; she could not say when he would return. Thinking that he had gone away to avoid me, I explained to the poor girl that I bore no animosity towards her husband, and that my wish was to see them living happily together. I called again upon my sister three days after—her husband was again absent, but she assured me eagerly that he had been home in the interval and stayed a whole day. The poor thing spoke of that one day with exultation that raised my suspicion. I questioned her as delicately as I could, and elicited the fact that her husband was more frequently away from his home than in it. Now what should you say to that, ma'am?' he asked, striking his knee and looking at Miss Trevor.

Miss Trevor did not look up from her work, but her fingers were idle, and I saw she was greatly embarrassed to reply. She was thinking of me. There were parts of this history which coincided with mine strangely. I was terribly eager to know the continuation, and yet I dreaded it.

'Business might take him away,' urged Miss Trevor timidly. 'Captain Bromley, for example, leaves us occasionally, having duties to attend to in connection with his regiment.'

(It was thus I had explained Valentine's absence to Miss Trevor.)

'That is quite another matter,' said Mr. Everleigh; 'while a man holds a commission in the army, he is compelled to be at his post when duty calls him; but what should you say, Mrs. Bromley,' he asked, turning to me, 'if your husband had retired from active service, and quitted you as if he still held his commission? Would you not suspect something—would you be blind to the fact which must be palpable to everyone else?'

Happily my back was to the light, or he must have seen that I was agitated greatly. It was not a supposititious

case he laid before me, but the case as it existed. Valentine no longer held a commission. I knew that it was no military duty that took him away. If I had only kept a clear head and remembered Mr. Schlobach's axiom, I should have answered, 'That I could suspect my husband of no ill while I loved him.' But I was a fool, and bewildered, and could say nothing intelligible.

He took my indistinct utterance to mean that I agreed with him.

'Of course you would! You would say—That man is a traitor!'

That terrible word 'traitor' rose to my lips; it had almost escaped me. I clenched my teeth and buried my finger-nails in the palms of my hands in the effort to control myself.

'That is what anyone with any knowledge of the world and human nature would say,' he pursued; 'but Kate is a child, a school-girl, with a girl's ignorance of real life; she is infatuated, poor little soul, and her simple, confiding nature is a toy for this man to play with. I know not what pretence he makes for leaving her alone. Perhaps he scarcely thinks it worth while to make any, but simply trusts to her blind faith in him. What does it matter to him, so long as he can amuse himself for a few hours with her and get away when her love palls upon his senses and his jaded spirit craves for variety.'

'But are you sure, sir, that it is not some affair of business, some occupation which cannot well be explained to such a simple girl as your sister, that obliges him to leave her?' asked Miss Trevor in some agitation.

'Oh, I have settled that beyond doubt,' answered Mr. Everleigh; 'the mystery, like most of that kind, was easy enough to unravel. I followed him one day—my sister might have done the same at any time, had she not been so completely trusting, and so hoodwinked and governed by her husband—I followed, and found that he is actually married to another woman.'

'Married!' I exclaimed.

'Surely, sir, he has not committed the crime of bigamy,' said Miss Trevor.

'He has done so, and that adds to the difficulty of the case; a common liaison might have been set aside, and the

man might have been reclaimed; there would be hope, though an unsatisfactory one, of some future arrangement between poor Kate and him. But that is out of the question.'

'But the second wife has no right to the title; she is—she is nothing,' said Miss Trevor.

'That is too true. Unfortunately, my sister is the second wife.'

'Is it possible?'

'Yes, I have made inquiries, and find that this man was married ten years ago. He was then in poor circumstances, and his wife left him. Now that she finds he has money, and can support her in idleness and luxury, she claims her right to be recognised as his wife.'

'It is most extraordinary!'

'Pardon me, it is most common, my lawyer tells me. He assures me that cases of this kind are constantly occurring: a wife forsakes her husband in a period of poverty, and turns up again when he has acquired a fortune.'

'And your sister, sir, what are her feelings now?'

'They are yet unaltered. I dare not tell her.'

'Poor young wife, it will break her heart!'

'I would it might,' said Mr. Everleigh earnestly. 'If this news could kill her it would be a mercy to tell her all and at once. But I fear a worse result than that.'

'A worse result, sir! surely none exists?' said Miss Trevor.

'Yes, far worse. She may reconcile herself to living a dishonoured life, that is what I fear. Women—I speak of the feebler sort, such as my sister—have not the nice sense of honour that prevailed in purer days. I doubt if any woman now dies of shame and despair, except in romances. They overcome fine feelings, they are taught to look upon them as strained sentiments, a poetic life that has nothing in common with our everyday existence. If they are provoked to rage finding themselves the dupe of a scoundrel, the feeling is but momentary—it passes away; the old feeling of affection revives, they forgive the man who has dishonoured them, and too frequently are willing to resume friendship with their betrayers. This is a fact; it is so in nine cases out of ten.'

'No,' I cried, interrupting him, for I felt that he wronged

me in this aspersion upon my sex ; 'no, it is not a fact ! A woman will *not* forgive the man who dishonours her, who cheats her, and makes her his toy. She will hate him, she will take his life if it is in her power. She will never, never forgive that wrong.'

I had risen to my feet, and spoke with intense passion, for I put myself in the place of Mr. Everleigh's sister, and the wrong done to her was felt by me. I sat down with rage in my heart, and trembling from head to foot.

Miss Trevor and Mr. Everleigh both seemed frightened by this exhibition of passion, and at once dropped the subject.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE NARRATIVE OF DOROTHEA BROMLEY CONTINUED.

'WELL, Doris, what is it?' asked Valentine, as we were driving home from Victoria Station.

'What do you mean, dear?' I asked, conscious that the colour was rising in my face.

'What is the matter? that is what I mean,' he said, smiling.

'Nothing,' I replied. 'Why do you ask?'

'Because you are not so bright as when you were taking me away from home, and generally it is quite the other way about. You are thoughtful and quiet—has anything happened?'

'No, dear.'

'No one called?'

'Mr. Everleigh called.'

'Ah, ah!' he exclaimed, pretending to look grave. 'My learned rival! His discourse has not given you reason to regret having married a dull soldier, who treats insects—especially mosquitoes—as an unnecessary plague?'

'Don't be a goose,' I said, half amused, and yet fretfully.

'And what had he to say for himself?' he asked, changing his tone.

'He told me a very unhappy story about his sister; and I think that is what makes me a little quiet.'

'In that case we will not talk about it; we do not want to be quiet now.'

I made an effort to shake off the gloom that weighed upon my spirits, and be gay ; but it was an effort. I had to search for subjects of interest to talk about, whereas ordinarily the ideas came only too fast, so that my words wouldn't keep pace with the flood of things I wanted to tell my husband about. I had to try and recall what had made me so lively on previous occasions, that I might dip again in the same source. And all the time I was conscious that Valentine saw through me, and knew I was ill at ease. That made it all the more difficult to appear easy.

I did not know what was the matter with me. I could not explain it to myself except in the way I had accounted for it to Valentine.

Mr. Everleigh had made an impression on my mind which I could not possibly efface. The story of his sister was constantly in my mind, no matter what I was doing. I thought my feeling was simply sympathy with an unfortunate girl, whose position in some respects resembled mine, nothing else. I would not see any resemblance between the girl's husband and Valentine. It had not yet come to that. Yet I suppose the idea of such a resemblance, though unacknowledged, existed in my mind, and was the real cause of my depression. The feeling was like the symptoms that forerun the breaking out of a disease.

But what perplexed and troubled me beyond everything was the strange disposition of my heart towards Valentine, and the wild fluctuations of hot and cold emotion ; at one moment feeling the need of his dear embraces, and the next a certain repugnance even to the touch of his hand. Thus it was after lunch.

Insensibly I had led the conversation to the subject of home love.

' Mr. Percival,' I said, ' must have been very fond of his home to have given so much care to beautifying it.'

' Yes,' Valentine answered carelessly ; ' I imagine he thought of nothing else but painting pictures and spending his money on gimcracks. It is a very respectable virtue, I dare say ; but it seems to me a man must have very limited ideas who has but those two objects in view.'

' It is not the object of your life,' I said.

' Well hit, Doris,' he replied, laughing. ' It is not the object of my life, and that is why I find fault with it, doubt-

less. One overlooks one's own defects in looking for the defects of others. My training has always been the other way, and I have learnt to disregard home comforts, never having had any, and constantly changing my quarters. One set of chambers is pretty much like another, yet there is some diversity in the surrounding neighbours, and that is the great charm. One always looked forward to variety in changing from one garrison to another.'

A chill crept over me. My fingers were cold as I clasped them on my lap

'And you—you prefer that variety to being constantly in the same place?' I said, with difficulty.

'I should think so! Fancy being stuck for perpetuity at Chatham,' he replied, misapprehending my meaning; then he continued, looking round the room, and following the previous train of thought: 'I can understand a man surrounding himself with pleasant things—furniture and decorations in good taste; that is as natural as preferring bright faces to dull ones; but that which I do not understand is the infatuation of a man for covering his walls with pictures which from their very costliness he cannot lay aside and replace with fresh ones. To look at the same pictures for three hundred and sixty-five days in the year, and from the beginning of one decade to the end of the next, is, to my mind, as bad as having no pictures at all. The eye must get accustomed to them, and they have no value but to gratify the ostentatious desire of showing the world that one has a finer collection than the majority of individuals can display.'

I said to myself:

'I wonder if my face is growing dull, and if it is dull will he find it natural to prefer brighter ones? And if he sees nothing in a picture to admire after the first glance, shall I charm his eyes?—will he want to look at me all the days in the year, from the beginning to the end of our married lives?' These fancies wrung my heart for a moment, and then my pride was stung with the notion that he rated me as little better than a picture, inasmuch as he might afford to lay me aside and replace me with another. Suspicions so madly unjust could only take possession of a heart strongly susceptible of jealousy: they held mine and rankled in it. And as I looked at my husband then I could see

nothing in him to love, but rather a nature that might be hated with the most intense malignity.

He was smoking a cigarette ; as he turned to lay the ash in a tray he caught sight of me, and his eyes were riveted in a moment on my face.

I shrank like a guilty creature before the frank, open gaze of those penetrating eyes that read my soul's secret. I knew that I had wronged him : and oh ! a selfish joy elated me in the knowledge that I had so wronged him, and that he was good and generous and above suspicion ; and that, mingled with the shame and remorse I felt at the same time in being discovered, overcame me, and I burst into tears. He did not move from his seat, he did not speak. I thought he was angry, and meant to punish me. I could not bear that. I rose, and went to him, still covering my face with my hands. He took me upon his knee, circling me with his arms, and, as I laid my cheek upon his breast, I kissed his coat, and felt I was scarcely worthy to do that.

' You don't feel well to-day, love,' he said soothingly.

I shook my head, still not daring to look at him. I was glad to be misunderstood ; I dared not tell him the truth.

' Will you lie down for an hour or two, or would you like better to go out ?' he asked.

' Go out,' I answered, wiping my tears away.

He kissed me, kept me a little longer in his arms, talking to me tenderly and cheerfully, and then, after a parting hug, I ran away, and dressed to go out, while he sent for the carriage.

We went out, and I was happy. The little storm had cleared away the heavy, morbid fancies and done me good. He did not refer to what had happened, nor did I. He was unenlightened as to the cause of this outburst, for Miss Trevor was silent about Mr. Everleigh—unaccountably so, it seemed to me. Perhaps Mr. Everleigh's story had suggested a parallel to her mind, and she felt it best to keep her thoughts to herself.

' Don't stick too closely to the music, Doris dear,' Valentine said, when he was leaving me on Friday. ' It will be learnt easier with a light heart. Get out as much as possible, and look on the hopeful side of things without fear of disappointment.'

There was a significance in these words which was not

lost upon me. He could see by my face how hopeful he had made me.

It was on Saturday that Mr. Everleigh called again. He had a small box in his hands. It contained specimens of the insects he had collected in Algeria, and he had called to leave them for Mr. Schlobach. This, he explained, was the object of his visit.

The professor had gone as usual to spend the afternoon in the reading-room of the British Museum; it would not be long now before he returned. I asked Mr. Everleigh to stay until he came in.

Miss Trevor's manner was very cold and reserved. I think she disapproved of this visit so soon after the last. Perhaps she had seen how miserable I had been made by the history of his sister, and feared that he would renew my trouble. Mr. Everleigh, however, made no reference to the subject—rather he avoided it, conscious that it had produced an unpleasant impression upon me. I thought that possibly he had called to counteract the unfavourable effect of his previous visit. He had made no comment when he heard that Valentine was again absent, but simply expressed his regret in being so unfortunate in his time of calling.

I think I have said before that Mr. Everleigh had a remarkable power of making himself agreeable. He talked well, and with ease, and chose subjects of conversation to interest those he talked with. He had a fund of anecdotes applicable to any theme, and that afternoon he was particularly agreeable.

Miss Trevor gradually unbent, and joined with good-will in the conversation, when we began to talk about old times at Faulcondale. Old times were a subject that she and I were fond of discussing, and Mr. Everleigh's wonderful memory furnished us with abundant incident for small talk. Altogether we found his company very pleasant, and he revived the good feeling we had felt for him in the days when his visits to Faulcondale were a real pleasure to us.

We had been laughing over the recollection of a ludicrous incident that occurred to the professor when he and Mr. Everleigh were out on the hills with their nets, and our voices were for a moment lulled, when we heard a knock at the street door.

'Ah, there is Mr. Schlobach!' said Miss Trevor, looking at her watch.

'No,' I cried, springing to my feet joyfully. 'It is Valentine. Only he knocks like that.'

And without a thought of propriety I ran out of the room and downstairs. It was Valentine. I was overjoyed to see him, for I had received no intimation of his coming.

'Come in here, love,' I said, drawing him into the library. 'Mr. Everleigh is in the drawing-room.'

I did not want to lose the delight of a long embrace; Mr. Everleigh might wait for us.

Valentine explained that he had only just time to catch the train, or he would have sent a telegram in the ordinary way, that I might meet him at the station.

'What does it matter, dear, so that you are here?' I said.

The joy of meeting lasted a long while. At length Valentine said:

'We mustn't forget your old friend. Let us go up, or he may escape me again, as he did the first time we came under the same roof.'

We went upstairs. Miss Trevor was knitting with composure by the window. She was alone.

'Why, where is Mr. Everleigh?' I asked.

Miss Trevor looked at me in astonishment, and, taking off her spectacles, said:

'Why, he has been downstairs with you, has he not?'

'No; we have been in the library, and have seen nothing of him,' I replied.

With many exclamations of surprise she told us that he had followed me almost immediately, as she had concluded, to be introduced to Captain Bromley.

It was odd. We went down to the hall, and looked in the reception-room; it was empty. Mr. Everleigh's hat was gone from the hall where he had left it, and he was gone also. For the second time he had vanished, as it were, at the sight of Valentine.

We were at a loss to account for his extraordinary conduct.

'It is the eccentricity of genius,' said Valentine, laughing.

'But Mr. Everleigh is not eccentric,' I said.

'Then he will need an extra amount of genius to give a satisfactory excuse for his impoliteness,' he responded; and with that he dismissed the subject from his thoughts. But it perplexed the rest of us whenever we thought of it. That

is not strange. For we knew Mr. Everleigh as he was—a young, good-looking man, well dressed, and exceedingly careful in behaviour; whereas Valentine, I knew, had formed a quite different conception. He spoke of him always as if he were an elderly, grotesque, and somewhat ridiculous personage. Perhaps at some time he had come in contact with a near-sighted naturalist of odd appearance and quiet habits (like Mr. Schlobach, in fact), and loosely classed all men of science in the same category. Be that as it may, Valentine never once referred to the strange disappearance during the day, and I was too happy in his society then to give more than a passing thought to it.

It was foggy on Sunday; we did not go out of the house, and we had no reason to regret being imprisoned, for we were together, and the bright fire was not more cheerful than we.

Early on Monday morning Valentine received a telegram. He read it through, and then, thrusting it in his pocket, rose and said:

‘I must leave you at once, dear.’ He looked at his watch: ‘Do you think it fine enough to take me to the station?’

Of course it was; no weather was too bad in my opinion for me to go anywhere with my husband. I sent for the carriage, and ran up to dress, while Valentine went to his room to change his dressing-gown for his morning coat.

On our way to the station, seeing him in his grave mood, I ventured to say:

‘There is nothing serious, dear, in the news you have received?’

‘No, no,’ he said, as if it were nothing which might not be arranged. ‘It takes me away from you a few hours sooner than I intended; that is one unpleasantness. I must have gone away in the afternoon.’

I said no more upon the subject, though, of course, I wondered much. I could not help that. It was something more than idle curiosity I had to overcome.

Shortly after I had returned to Warburton Villa the housemaid brought me a crumpled sheet of buff paper.

‘If you please, ma’am,’ she said, ‘I found this on the floor of master’s dressing-room. I think it must have fallen out of Mr. Bromley’s dressing-gown pocket when I was moving it.’

Without thinking what I was doing, I opened the paper and glanced at it. I had certainly no wrong intention in reading it. Had I reflected for a moment, I should have seen that this was the telegram he had received, and purposely avoided reading it. The act was done before I was aware of the consequences. This was the message :

<i>From</i> —, Chislehurst.	<i>To</i> VALENTINE BROMLEY, Esq., Warburton Villa, Kensington.
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‘I am in danger. I have seen him. Come at once.’

Who was the anonymous sender of this telegram ? Who the person to whom it referred ? What danger was imminent ? Was Valentine also menaced ? These were some of the questions that occurred to me, and gave my mind no rest.

Between four and five o'clock another telegram came, and this was for me. I knew it could come from no one but Valentine, and I broke it open in feverish haste. The message ran thus :

<i>From</i> VALENTINE BROMLEY, Woldhurst, Chislehurst.	<i>To</i> Mrs. BROMLEY, Warburton Villa, Kensington.
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‘Come to me here. A train leaves Victoria for Bickley at five minutes past six. A carriage will be waiting for you at Bickley.’

With a cry of delight I set myself to read it again. It was quite plain there could be no mistake. I was to go to my husband at Chislehurst.

‘Now,’ I said to myself, ‘I shall know all ! There is to be an end of the mystery, with all the cruel doubts it has raised in my foolish mind !’

CHAPTER XXVII.

FROM THE NARRATIVE OF DOROTHEA BROMLEY CONTINUED.

I RAN upstairs and put that wonderful telegram in Miss Trevor's hands, and, while she was spelling it out, I threw

my arms around the professor's neck, laughing, with the tears in my eyes. No wonder they looked at me with such astonishment. I was beside myself with joy.

'I am very glad; yes, I am very glad indeed,' said Mr. Schlobach. 'All is well that ends well. Love makes light of hardships; but you have borne a great deal, and if you had not loved your husband well enough to have faith in him, then you would have been very unhappy, my child.'

I saw now that this dear old friend had been much concerned for me during the past weeks, though he had pretended to take Valentine's frequent absence as a matter of course, and in no way surprising. And as it was the most difficult thing for him to be silent where his feelings were concerned, and to conceal anything, he must have regarded the state of things with extraordinary anxiety.

I did not give myself time to make this reflection then. In a flutter of excitement I went to my room, and prepared for departure. How should I dress? That was the first question. In the dress Valentine most admired, I decided. Then I should be sure of his approval, no matter how far beneath the standard of excellence it appeared in the eyes of his fashionable friends. For friends of that sort I was convinced he had, and I should doubtless meet them. Then what should I take with me? Not a great deal, lest it might happen that my stay at Chislehurst was to be only of short duration. If, as I believed in my heart, I was to stop there and make it my real home henceforth, it would be quite easy to send for the rest of my clothing. I would take my diamonds, certainly. I might have to wear them that very evening. I put the cases at the bottom of my travelling bag. I must take a dress for the morning—it was not probable I should have to leave Woldhurst before that. I went to my wardrobe, and looking at my dresses, I considered which it would be best to take. As I thought of my house, with the beautiful woods about it, I thought perhaps that Valentine would propose a walk in the country—the thing I most desired. I seemed to hear the rustling of the autumn leaves under my feet, and catch the fragrance that rose from them. I caught sight of the close-fitting black merino dress I had worn in the old time at Faulcondale, which I had kept for the sake of old associations, and because Valentine liked it. I gave it to the maid to pack in with the

indispensable things she had already collected, and my French shoes.

When all my arrangements were made, I went downstairs, where Miss Trevor had prepared tea. I could eat nothing, but I drank a cup of tea, talking to the professor and Miss Trevor with such volubility that they had no opportunity to say anything but yes and no. And I continually looked at my watch, and then at the timepiece, to be sure I was not mistaking the time. I got to Victoria long before the train started. I bought some papers, thinking I would sit down quietly in the waiting-room and read them. But that was out of the question. I did not even grasp the sense of the legend under a humorous illustration in *Punch*, and the rest of the papers might have been written in Hebrew, for any idea their contents carried to my mind.

How my heart beat when the train at length stopped at Bickley, and I stepped on to the platform! I thought that perhaps Valentine would be there to meet me; but I looked for him in vain. Whilst I was thus looking to the right and left along the platform, a coachman in livery came forward, and, touching his hat, said:

‘Beg pardon, ma’am, but are you Mrs. Bromley?’

‘Yes,’ I answered eagerly.

‘The carriage is waiting for you outside, ma’am,’ he said; and taking my bag, he accompanied me through the station into the road, where a brougham with bright lighted lamps was standing. ‘Any other luggage, ma’am?’ he asked, as he closed the door.

I said ‘No.’ He touched his hat again, got up into his seat, and the next minute the wheels began to move with a pleasant sound in the moist gravel. Then we ran on to the hard road, and the sound was pleasanter still to my ears. ‘At such a pace,’ I said to myself, ‘we shall quickly reach Woldhurst.’

We soon got away from the houses and into a road where there were gas lamps at long intervals. The evening was still, and even at this distance from London there was a fog, or it might have been only a thick mist. The lights along the road appeared dull and hazy; I could see nothing beyond them. Only the reins of the driver, his hands, and the dashboard in front, were clear through the window in front. Nevertheless, it was cheerful with the quick beat of the

horses' hoofs, and the muffled rumbling of the wheels, and the pleasant anticipation that occupied my thoughts.

As Valentine had not come to meet me, I presumed that he had friends to entertain. I was not a bit afraid of meeting them. I felt sure that I should do nothing that would make my husband blush for me. I had learnt how to enter a room, and how to receive visitors. Perhaps they would admire me, and then my husband would be proud of me. One thing delighted me above others—the coachman had asked if I had no other luggage. Evidently Valentine intended me to stay, or he would not have instructed the man to look after my affairs. 'All is well that ends well,' I said, repeating the professor's words, and what a dear, wise old friend he was who should say things so true, so worthy of repeating. Everything seemed so good that I began to hum a tune to myself.

Just then the coachman tightened the reins, checking the horses' pace, and finally bringing them to a stand. At the same moment, a figure in a light overcoat came within the radius of the light thrown by the carriage lamps, and advanced to the door. Was it Valentine, after all?

The handle turned, the door opened; there was just sufficient reflected light to show me that the figure was not Valentine's, but a thinner, slighter man's.

'Mrs. Bromley,' said a voice I did not at once recognise.

'Yes,' said I, a little frightened; 'who are you?'

'I am Richard Everleigh.'

Then I knew the voice, and distinguished him.

'Pardon me,' he added; and without asking my consent, he stepped into the brougham, and seated himself beside me. As he shut the door, the coachman drove on, but less rapidly than before.

I was utterly astonished; so much so, that I could not decide whether to be angry or not at his intrusion. As he bent forward to close the door, I saw that he had on a white tie. This suggested an explanation.

'Are you going to Woldhurst?' I asked.

'Yes,' he answered.

'You have seen my husband since your visit to Kensington?' I asked.

'No, but I saw him then,' he replied significantly and with a menacing accent, which offended me, perplexed as I was.

'May I ask—— I began, in a tone of resentment.

He interrupted me.

'First of all, Mrs. Bromley, you must understand that I am your friend—the sincerest friend—perhaps the only one who can serve you at this moment, when you most need a friend.'

'You my only friend! where is my husband?' I asked.

'You shall see your husband,' he said. 'I am taking you to him now.'

'Great heavens!' I exclaimed. 'No accident has befallen him?'

'None that is not of his own seeking.'

'I do not understand.'

'I wish you to understand, that is why I have brought you here, why I am here beside you now.'

'You brought me here?'

'Yes; the telegram you received this afternoon I sent. This brougham was sent by me to meet you; the driver was instructed to stop at the spot where I got in. All has been arranged by me for the express purpose of this interview.'

'But Valentine—my husband—'

'Believes you are at Kensington—believes you are still his unsuspecting, obedient, infatuated dupe. He has the utmost faith in you, and in his own ability to cozen you.'

'How dare you say this to me?' I cried indignantly. 'Stop the carriage!'

'First listen to what I have to tell you.'

'No, I will not listen to anything against my husband. I will not sit beside you. Stop the carriage, or I will get out this instant!'

To tell the truth, with my passionate indignation at the suggestion he had made there was mingled a certain vague terror that this man had got me into his power to do me personal violence.

'If you insist,' he said calmly, leaning forward and taking hold of the string that communicated with the coachman. 'If you will not profit by the services of a friend, I must relinquish you to the tender mercies of your enemy. Where shall I tell the coachman to take you?'

'To my husband.'

He paused an instant, and then said:

'If you will not accept my help, it will be better to go back at once to London.'

I did not answer him, but, bending forward, I put my hand on the door handle.

‘For heaven’s sake, do nothing rash,’ he said, holding my arm. ‘In a few minutes we shall be at the house. Suffer me to go with you, I entreat. You will need a friend.’

‘I need no friend but my husband. I will go alone to him.’

I was desperate in my intention to get away from him. I had no time to reason; and, seeing it was useless to reason with me in my present state of excitement, he pulled the string, and the coachman drew up. He opened the door and got out; turning round, he said in a tone of deep sympathy, ‘I will follow you.’ Then he closed the door, turned to the driver, and said ‘Woldhurst,’ and the brougham moved on.

A lodge flanked the entrance gates. I recognised them when the carriage stopped. The gates were closed. Looking up the avenue, I could see through the mist a dimly luminous point showing where the house stood; there was a light also in the lodge. The lodge-door opened as the driver called out, and a man whom I did not know came out.

‘What name?’ he asked, with his hand on the gate.

‘I dunnow; better ask the lady inside,’ answered the driver in a low voice.

Distracted between a vague terror, and still vaguer hope, dreading that Mr. Everleigh would overtake me, seeing the lights of the house at the end of the avenue, where I believed that I might find shelter in Valentine’s arms, I could not brook delay. I fancied that if I got out I could run the length of the carriage drive in less time than it would take to give the necessary explanation to the lodge-keeper, and get the gates open for the brougham to pass. Acting upon impulse, I opened the door and stepped out quickly.

The lodge-keeper stepped forward, raising his knuckle to his forehead:

‘Beg pardon, miss, but who might you wish to see?’

‘Captain Bromley,’ I answered.

He shut the door and nodded to the driver, who at once turned the horses in the direction we had come. Then, putting his hand on the gate which I was about to open, he said, with deliberation:

‘You want to see Captain Bromley?’

Now I was terrified by this man. His manner was strange, unlike that of a servant. I could not see his face, only the silhouette of his burly figure against the gray mist illuminated by the light glimmering in the lodge window. We were quite alone. The sound of the carriage wheels grew fainter each moment.

‘Yes, I want to see Captain Bromley at once,’ I said. ‘Let me pass, if you please.’

‘Oh, certainly. Better come and sit down in the lodge, miss, while I take up your card to the house. I’m very sorry, miss, but you see I’m put here to keep the gate, and I must do my duty. Captain Bromley’s got friends, and he’s at dinner, and if you won’t send up your name——’

‘I am Mrs. Bromley,’ I said.

‘What Mrs. Bromley?’ he asked impudently.

‘Your master’s wife,’ I answered angrily.

‘Oh, come, that won’t do,’ said he, with a laugh. ‘I’ve been here two months, and you won’t make me believe you re Mrs. Valentine Bromley.’

I could not speak. My whole body shook with emotion, my knees trembled under me.

‘Besides,’ he pursued, ‘I see her at the dinner-table not five minutes ago.’

‘You saw—whom?’ I found strength to ask.

‘My master’s wife—Mrs. Valentine Bromley.’

‘His wife!’ I gasped; ‘his wife!’ and then, unable to support myself, I fell down upon my knees on the sodden path.

‘He is not *my* husband!’ I cried. ‘Great God, then what am I?’

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE NARRATIVE OF DOROTHEA BROMLEY CONTINUED.

A SICKNESS overpowered me, the earth seemed to be turning under me, there was a dull beating in my ears. I was unable to sustain myself upon my knees. I fell. Then I felt myself raised, a voice spoke peremptorily, a wet cloth was put upon my brows. The light grew stronger, and,

opening my eyes, I found myself seated in the lodge. The lodge-keeper stood before me with a bowl of water, and Mr. Everleigh was supporting my head and shoulders, as I sat supinely on a chair.

'You will be better now,' he said, removing the cloth from my brow. I sat up and wiped the moisture from my face with my handkerchief. I don't think I had lost consciousness; the shock had stunned me, that was all. I no longer felt sick or faint—only very weak, so that the handkerchief nearly fell from my nerveless fingers. A tumult of wild ideas had invaded my mind, and still kept my senses in a whirl.

I saw Mr. Everleigh put a piece of money in the lodge-keeper's hand, signing to him to leave the room. The man went out, and Mr. Everleigh came back to me with grave solicitude on his pale face. He looked round the room, and took down a tumbler from the sideboard. He poured some water into it; then, taking a small glass bottle from his waistcoat pocket, let three or four drops of liquid fall in the water.

'Drink that, it will do you good,' he said, handing the tumbler to me.

I obeyed, and felt calmer at once; then my strength came back a little.

'The fly is outside,' he said, when he saw the good effect his potion had made. 'Will you go home?'

Home! I had none. The thought struck me at once. What was I to do? I covered my eyes with my hands, and tried to collect my thoughts and find some way out of the darkness in which they were involved.

'Or,' pursued Mr. Everleigh, after a moment's pause, 'do you think it will be better to verify the truth of this charge against your—your husband; and to know by the evidence of your own senses whether this man has told you a lie, and whether I am to be trusted as a friend?'

'Yes, that will be best,' I said, bending my body, that my heart might beat less painfully.

'It seems to me the wiser course,' he said. 'It is best that you should know the truth, and realize the fact, dreadful as it is; and the sooner the better. That is why I brought you here. But I am doubtful of your strength.'

'I am prepared. I am ready,' I muttered faintly.

Looking at me thoughtfully, he shook his head. Then

he slipped his fingers in his pocket and drew out the little bottle from which he had poured the drops which revived me, together with another similar in appearance. He compared them by the light, and put one in the right-hand pocket, the other in the left.

‘It will be well to have this with us in case you break down again,’ he said.

He went out of the room. I heard him talking to the lodge-keeper. They were in conversation for some minutes, then Mr. Everleigh came back, saying he had persuaded the man to help us.

‘I have sent him up to the house to see if it will be safe to go up now,’ he said.

‘What need is there of that?’ I asked. ‘I shall go in and face my husband.’

‘My poor child, do you think Mr. Bromley has not prepared for such an attempt on your part? The lodge-keeper refused to let you pass. He dared not have done that unless he had received instructions from his master. If one servant has been warned, all have been warned, and it would be as impossible for you to cross the threshold of the house as it was to pass the gate. I have bribed the gate-keeper to open the door of the conservatory; from there we can see into the dining-room—we may even hear what is said within. That will be enough.’

‘No, it will not be enough!’ I cried, clenching my hands, as the thought of what I might see and hear flashed upon me.

‘What else would you have beyond a knowledge of the truth?’

‘What else would I have?’ I cried, starting up from the chair, my hot imagination transporting me to that room where Valentine stood with the creature who dared to call herself his wife. But I did not answer the question; I could not form an idea of retribution; only my nature craved for vengeance.

Mr. Everleigh regarded me with perfect calmness for two or three seconds. Then he pursued:

‘What could you do there? Nothing but obey him once more.’

‘Obey *him*?’ I cried.

Every word he spoke stung me; I could only echo his phrases.

'Yes, obey him once more,' he repeated. 'If he says, "Leave this house—go back to the lodgings I have taken for you with the servant; I will permit——,"'

'Never—never—never!' I cried, interrupting him.

'But you must leave the house,' he said, in the same quiet tone. 'Mrs. Bromley will not suffer you to remain there.'

It seemed as if my blood turned to fire at this insult. I turned upon Mr. Everleigh choking with passion. He did not give me time to speak.

'You must put yourself in her place—she, too, is an injured woman. Remember she is his lawful wife: you are not. She took possession of the house while Captain Bromley was travelling with you, and she has a right to stay there and forbid you to put your foot upon the doorstep. She has done you no wrong; on the contrary, she is justified in thinking that she is wronged by you, who have partly, and for a time, alienated her husband from her. Captain Bromley has a certain sort of passion for you, and until he grows weary of you will be anxious to keep you in the pretty lodgings—spending what time he can conveniently spare in your company—tricking you out with finery, and——'

I cried out in agony, and, dropping into the chair, covered my face with my hands. Mr. Everleigh ceased to speak. There was silence for a minute, and then the door-handle turned, and the lodge-keeper entered.

'You can come. They are still at dinner,' he said.

'Will you come?' asked Mr. Everleigh.

I shook my head. I did not want to see that woman.

'You must come,' said Mr. Everleigh in a low tone, but firmly. 'To-morrow you will not believe what you have heard to-day, unless you have more convincing proof. Valentine Bromley will find means to cheat you again, as he has cheated you before. He will tell a new lie, and you will believe him rather than accept the terrible reality.'

I rose, for even now I could not believe the worst. I felt that I must go through with this ordeal to the end.

'One moment, sir,' said the lodge-keeper, scratching his jaw thoughtfully—'what I'm doing is worth more than a sovereign: it's worth as much as my situation. And, unless the young lady will promise not to be violent and kick up a row, I can't go no further.'

'You will control your feelings?' Mr. Everleigh said, turning to me.

'Yes,' I answered.

'I will answer for the young lady keeping her word,' said Mr. Everleigh.

'So long as you're responsible, sir, I don't mind. I know you, and can trust in you,' said the man, opening the door.

We went out into the misty night. Once more the trembling fit was upon me; I had to close my teeth tightly to prevent them chattering. But I would not accept Mr. Everleigh's arm. I hated him for what he had told me.

'Not that way—this,' said he, when we came to a fork in the path, and I was about to take one that led straight to the lights before me. 'You see I know the place better than you,' he continued, speaking in a low tone not to be heard by the lodge-keeper, who followed us at a few paces. 'I have been watching the house for weeks, ever since Mrs. Bromley took possession of it. I have known Valentine Bromley longer than I have known you—and he knows me, though by another name. Twice he has nearly caught me in your presence—once at Faulcondale, and a few days ago at Kensington. I suspected his wife was alive; I could not reveal my suspicions without proof. To save you from this misfortune, this awful degradation, I set myself to find her when I heard that he had proposed to marry you. Unhappily, the discovery came too late. He had gone through that mock ceremony of marriage, and taken you away. I tried to break this truth to you by the pretended history of my sister. Would it had been my sister and not you that this villain chose for his victim.'

I made no reply. These facts were of small moment to me then.

The path we had taken led through the shrubbery which skirted the lawn to that side of the house adjoining the conservatory.

'Wait here a moment, sir,' said the lodge-keeper, when we came to an opening close to the house.

We stopped, and he went on softly across the grass. There was no light in the conservatory, but there were reflections upon the glass and the shining leaves of the camellias from the dining-room, which opened into it.

The lodge-keeper returned, and held up his finger as a sign for us to come. I paused a moment to get strength

and courage, and then, feeling already sick and faint, I tottered forward. Mr. Everleigh grasped my arm tightly; I was indifferent to his touch then.

At the door of the conservatory I heard laughter—men's and women's—and then the voice of my husband, deep and sonorous; but I could not catch what he said. A few steps further, and I stood before the window.

The curtains were not drawn, some foliage alone screened the room partly from my sight. Mr. Everleigh put out his hand, and bent the sprays. Then I could see the long table, decorated with beautiful flowers, and those who sat at it. Valentine's back was towards me. A gentleman and lady sat on the right, and two others on his left. At the head of the table, facing him, sat the woman I had come to see.

I had expected to find her a vulgar, hard-featured, middle-aged woman of the world. I saw a young woman, not more than five or six years older than myself, slight and delicate, with a careworn and rather timid expression on a fair face that was neither worldly nor coarse.

'She, too, is an injured woman!'

These words of Mr. Everleigh's returned to my mind.

The windows, that opened to the ground, were partly open; the voices came clear and sharp to my ear.

A gentleman was commenting upon some local matter they had been discussing. When he finished speaking there was a pause. Then the gentleman on the other side, raising his voice as one does in beginning a new subject, said:

'And how long do you intend staying amongst us, Captain Bromley?'

'That depends altogether upon the wife's health,' answered Valentine. 'The doctors say she must not leave the house until she is quite restored.'

'Then, to a certain degree the doctors are our friends,' said the gentleman. 'You will return in the spring, I suppose, Mrs. Bromley?'

'That depends upon my husband,' she replied. 'If Valentine——'

The rest was a confused murmur in my ears. I reeled backwards. The lodge-keeper, I believe, prevented me from falling; at the same time, to stifle my cry, Mr. Everleigh put a handkerchief to my mouth. Then I lost all consciousness.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE NARRATIVE OF DOROTHEA BROMLEY CONTINUED.

WHEN I recovered my senses, I found myself lying on a bed in a small room with whitewashed walls, a latticed window, and a beamed ceiling. It was so like the cottage rooms at Faulcondale, that for a moment I thought I was in my old home, just awoke from troubled sleep. For I knew something terrible had happened; there was a pain at my heart as if it were broken. Still perplexed, I turned my head, and saw, standing by my side, Mr. Everleigh and an elderly woman, who held a lamp in her hand.

Mr. Everleigh put his fingers upon my pulse. I started up, snatching my hand away; for the scene in the conservatory flashed upon my recollection, and my first feeling was abhorrence, not, strange to say, of Valentine, who had betrayed me, but of the man who had betrayed him to me.

'She is better now,' said Mr. Everleigh to the woman; 'put down the light, we can leave her for a time.'

'Won't the young lady take something, sir?' asked the woman. 'We keep the very best of rum.'

'No; there is water on the table—that will be all she requires at present.' Then, turning to me, he said, 'We will leave you; lie down and repose yourself; if you need anything, you have but to call. Without rest it will be dangerous to leave this place. Try to sleep for an hour.'

Sleep for an hour! I should have laughed had not all sense of humour been chased from my spirit by fierce passion. Sleep, with rage in my heart and tumult in my brain! Sleep, when every nerve was strung up and my whole being craved to be in action! 'Can I ever sleep again?' I asked myself.

I sprang from the bed as the door closed, and stood like a wild beast prepared to spring, yet not knowing on whom to fasten. I had something to do. What was it? I must put my thoughts into order, get some definite idea of my position, and make up my mind what course I was to take. My eye fell upon the glass of water on the table. I seized it, and drank it down, thinking it would cool my heated brain. It might have been a fiery spirit for all I knew then, or now know.

I set myself to go over the events of the evening, and succeeded in tracing them to the moment I fainted. On a chair I saw the travelling bag which I had left in the brougham; and from this I concluded I had been carried back to the lodge, and brought away insensible in the brougham here. Where was I? Not far from Woldhurst, certainly, or I should have revived on my way hither. It might be quite near. This suggested one thing that might be done, and should be done at once. It was little enough, but I seized the idea with avidity. I tore off the dress that had been bought with Valentine's money, and put on the simple costume I had worn in the old days before my marriage. Then I took out my ear-rings, stripped off my bracelets, and the gem rings from my fingers, and, last of all, I took off my wedding-ring, that I had been so proud of, and had no right to wear.

I cannot think of this now without crying. How happy I had been when he first admired that simple dress; how happy again when I packed it, thinking, 'Perhaps he will take me into the woods to-morrow, where we shall hear the brown leaves rustle under our feet!' And what a thrill of joy I had felt as he put the wedding-ring on my finger, and how I had looked at it with love and reverence many times, making resolutions as I kissed it to overcome my faults, and be loyal and true for ever to the dear partner of my life, who had given it to me as a token of enduring love. And then what pride I had felt, when he gave me rich dresses and rare diamonds, in thinking he had found the picture worthy of such fine setting. My heart aches with the remembrance of that moment, when all my hope and joy and pride were gone from me with the gifts of his hand, and nothing was left upon me of the things I had prized for his sake—no trifle cherished as a love token—no vestige of pride or hope—not even the tender recollections of past happiness.

I stop now to wipe away the tears that dim my eyes; but I did not weep then. Anger left no place for grief in my heart. No gentle memories were awoke by the sight of the things I was casting off for ever.

'With this ring,' I said, 'he tricked me, dishonoured me, debased me to the level of a vile woman. These diamonds are the price he was willing to pay for his pleasure; with these baubles he thought to reconcile me to my shame.

From the first he has worked upon me as if I were a child having no pleasure but the gratification of my senses, and with these glittering playthings he has amused me, kept me in good humour, petted me, and held me in his power. What am I; only an ignorant country girl, to be played with and cast aside! a poor fool, to be cajoled and laughed at, a jest for the club, a conquest to be chatted about with a friend and a cigar—the object of a few months' idle folly—an amusing creature with little freaks of jealousy that required a little management, a trifle of the past—gone, Heaven knows where, like a puff of smoke. Nothing!

I goaded myself with these bitter reflections as I threw the relics of his love into the bag, closed it, and went to the door. The key was turned on the outside, but in a moment the door was unlocked, and Mr. Everleigh stood before me.

'Up already?' he said, in a tone of surprise that galled me.

'Do you, too, think I am an idiot?' I asked; 'a baby to be lulled to sleep—a senseless dolt, anxious to forget—dull to a sense of dishonour and degradation?'

'Be calm, my child.'

'I am not a child! I am a woman.'

'Yes; an outraged woman, yet still a child,' he said; 'a child in experience—a child in power to redress your wrongs—to shape a course in the future.'

'Experience! What woman has gone through more than I—what woman has more to learn?'

He was closing the door.

'Wait,' I said; 'let me go.'

'Where?' he asked, standing between me and the door.

'To Woldhurst.'

'No,' he said. 'I cannot let you go out until you have recovered your self-control.'

'I will go!' I cried fiercely.

'You shall go—when you are calm. It is half-past nine; the roads are dark. There is not a light, nor anyone who can direct you. You might wander about until you fainted again with exhaustion. You say you are no longer a child: prove it; be reasonable.'

I saw that I must be guided—that no end would be gained by following the first impulse.

'I am here to help, not to hinder you,' he said, quitting

the door, as if assured that I would not attempt to go now. 'I know your purpose in wishing to go to Woldhurst.' He placed a chair for me, and seated himself opposite. 'You have changed your dress, and taken off your trinkets. You intend to give them back to Valentine Bromley?'

'Yes; I will not keep anything that has come from his hands.'

'You do well. That is the course a woman should take. I promise you that in an hour he shall have them, and know that you scorn to keep his gifts and profit by his bounty in any way. But you must not take them. It would involve you in a vulgar squabble with the servants, and possibly end in your being sent to a police-station. A woman can be punished for annoying a gentleman in his house.'

'You believe he would have me punished if I went there—suffer his servants to lay hands on me?'

The words choked me.

'Why not?' asked Mr. Everleigh coldly. 'The shame is slight, compared with that he has inflicted on you.'

'That is true.'

'For his pleasure he dishonoured you, employing the basest means; why should he hesitate as to the means of getting rid of you when you trouble him? It is a common case—a man betrays a girl, grows tired of her, discards her, and when she threatens his tranquillity, he claims the protection of the police—and gets it. The law is on his side. He has a right to amuse himself. His victim may be punished; not he—wait, I forgot: he went through the farce of a marriage ceremony; that is illegal, but what of that? If he likes to spend the cold months in the South of France, he is quite safe. Evidently that is what he is prepared to do. You heard him say this evening that he intended going away, and that he only waits for his wife to regain strength. You may be sure he will find out she is strong enough to undertake the journey when he discovers that you are no longer to be played with. May I ask for what length of time he has taken the house in Kensington?'

'Six months.'

'Six months!' he said, shrugging his shoulders; then, turning aside, and bending his brows as he looked upon the floor, he added, as if to himself, 'Calculating villain!'

I had sat and listened to him with forced patience, but I could bear this inaction no longer; it was maddening. With my blood fermenting in my veins, I started to my feet, and paced across the room.

'What am I to do?' I cried.

'I am thinking of that, Miss Howard,' he answered reflectively.

'Miss Howard!' Those two words did more than all the rest to make me realize my position. It was my name. I had no right to any other. It would have been an insult to have called me Mrs. Bromley now. Yet I hated Mr. Everleigh for calling me by my right name.

'Of course you will not go back to Kensington?'

'Go back to Kensington!' I cried, in indignation at the thought of returning to that house, made horrible by my shame.

'Of course not—of course not,' he said, still looking on the ground reflectively. 'I understand your feeling for that good and worthy old friend.'

I did not understand him for a moment. He continued: 'It would break the professor's heart to know this. He would accuse himself of having precipitated your ruin. It would kill him! It would kill him!'

I had not thought of Mr. Schlobach. I was too much engrossed in my own wrongs. But now I was reminded of him, I saw that this would indeed be a death-blow for him.

'It would kill him,' Mr. Everleigh repeated. 'He must not know. You cannot return to Kensington. Have you any other friends?'

'None.'

'Miss Howard, you must accept help from me. You must not think of me as an ordinary friend, but as a brother.'

'A brother!' I cried, wrought to the highest pitch of resentment by the thought of the disgrace and misery Valentine had brought upon me and my guardian. 'A brother! would a brother sit and calmly reason upon my disgrace? Would a brother suffer the villain who had done me this irreparable wrong to go unpunished?'

'No,' he cried, rising quickly, and speaking for the first time with passion; 'no, and the villain shall not go unpunished. Bromley shall not escape. What a brother

would do, I will do.' He took up the bag and went to the door. Then he turned to me, and said, 'Oh, you shall have no reason to reproach me with lack of sympathy. Your wrongs are mine, and shall be avenged.'

He opened the door as he spoke. I was terrified by his manner.

'What are you going to do?' I gasped.

'He shall know that you have sent me to him to restore all he has given you, and then——' he paused an instant, and then said, with sharp distinctness, 'I will shoot him through the heart!'

CHAPTER XXX.

THE NARRATIVE OF DOROTHEA BROMLEY CONTINUED.

My strength left me. I sank on the edge of the bed, paralyzed with horror. I was powerless to move, to think intelligibly, to do anything; and the shock to my mental system was just the same as if I had received an actual blow. I was stunned. My consciousness was utterly blank.

My presence of mind returned as I heard the movement of wheels and the sharp click of the carriage door being closed. The necessity of action restored my faculties. I started to my feet. Mr. Everleigh was on his way to take Valentine's life. That brought me to my senses in a moment, banishing all jealous and vengeful feelings. I thought only of Valentine as the man I loved above everyone in the world; I thought of him lying dead—slain at my instigation. To save him from that fate—to save myself from the awful responsibility of that crime—was now my sole object.

With a cry of desperation I sprang to the door, threw it open, and flew down the dark stairs. It was like the flight one takes in a dream pursuit. I know not how I reached the road. I was conscious only of passing through a room like the parlour of an inn. I stood in the road, breathlessly intent on catching the sound of carriage wheels. I heard them rumbling faintly in the distance to the right. I ran in that direction as fast as I could.

I fancy voices called to me from the inn door through which I had passed. Someone may have run after me; I am not sure. In the darkness it would be impossible to tell which way I had gone; for my feet seemed scarcely to touch the ground, and my footfall was noiseless. It is wonderful to me how I found my way. Did instinct guide me, or did the intense excitement of the moment give abnormal power to my faculties of seeing and hearing? I know not. Assuredly I continued to hear the rolling of wheels before me, or I should not have proceeded in that direction. Then as I came to the crest of a hill I saw a dull, luminous point below, which I felt sure was from the carriage lamps. On and on I sped, gaining on the faint point, and on and on until I saw another point of light in advance of the first.

‘That,’ I said, ‘must be the light from the lodge.’ And now the sound of wheels ceased, and I gained quickly on the lights of the carriage lamps.

I reached the fly; it was standing still; the door was open. I glanced inside; it was empty.

‘Where is he?’ I struggled to ask of the coachman, who, with one hand leaning on the box, was turning round to look at me.

He gaped at me in astonishment. I glanced ahead; the second light I had noticed seemed some distance from me, and on the right.

The light from the lamps shone on the oak palings bordering the pathway on that side. I remembered them. The grounds of Woldhurst were confined with palings of that kind.

‘Where is he?’ I said, in audible tones, yet still panting painfully for breath, and prepared to run on to the lodge.

He jerked his thumb over his shoulder in the opposite direction to the lodge, and opened his mouth to speak. But before a word was spoken, the sharp crack of a pistol-shot fell on our ears, and then another and another.

I fell on my knees with a shriek, for it seemed as if the bullet had gone through my own wicked heart.

Yet my senses were still alert. I expected to hear more. The horse made a movement, the clicking of the bit, the angry voice of the coachman drawing him in, the crunching of the wheels I heard, and then the rustling of shrubs, the sound of a man climbing over the palings, the thud of his

feet as they came to the ground—and a quick step. I saw Mr. Everleigh.

As he caught sight of me, he stopped, with an exclamation of surprise. Without a word he caught me up quickly, and lifted me into the carriage.

‘Bickley, sharp—double if you catch the 10.10,’ he said to the driver, as he sprang in after me.

The horse started off at a gallop. The lodge-keeper was in the room as we dashed past the gate.

‘I have played a brother’s part. You are avenged,’ said Mr. Everleigh; and from the pocket of his overcoat on the right he drew a revolver, and transferred it to the pocket on the left.

There was light enough for me to see that.

I drew away from him with sickening horror; I fancied Valentine’s blood was on his hands and clothes, his sodden coat hanging heavily, and sticking to my dress.

Then a frenzy seized me, and I should have opened the door and sprung out had he not held me down with firm hands that even in my passion I was unable to cope with.

‘Let me go, let me go!’ I cried. ‘It is villainous to kill a man, and fly. It is cowardly! It is infamous! Let me be free. I shall lose my senses if you hold me. I do not wish you to share the consequences of this deed. Go where you will, but let me return to him. I will not betray you. You are guiltless. I have murdered him—not you. My place is there beside his dead body. Let me return. I will soak my hands in his blood, and say, “It was I who took his life—with these bloody hands!” No one shall know that you did my bidding. I alone am guilty. Let me take the penalty. That is all I ask. You are a coward, a villain, to take me away from him. I shall hate and loathe you till I die if you refuse my just demand. I will bless you if you yield to my entreaty. Oh, let me go! For the love of mercy let me go back. Think: he may not be dead—he may breathe still. He may be asking for me. He may wish to forgive me. You cannot deny me this. Think: I am a woman. Have pity on me; let me go and kneel beside his body and say, “Darling, I have done this in my passion. Forgive me.”’

And in this way I continued to address him, now accusing him of baseness, now appealing to his mercy, now storming

with rage and passion, now entreating him like a child, and all like a poor, mad wretch as I was—until the paroxysm exhausted me, and left me weak and helpless, when I burst into a flood of tears, and sobs shook my miserable, nerveless being.

Then, and not till then, Mr. Everleigh relaxed his hold upon me. Heaven knows what would have become of me had he been moved by my passion to let me have my way.

I had undergone too much fatigue of mind and body for this convulsion to last long; and when it passed away a child might have led me. All my strength was gone, and I could only sob and cry.

While my tears flowed my heart was sensible to grief. I was not a woman then, but a child again. Silly ideas were in my mind. I thought of the old days at Faulcondale, of Coquelicot, of the dresses I wore, of the trouble I had given my guardian long ago, when he tried to teach me, of his love for me; and it was the thought of these trifles, the reflection that I should never more be happy and innocent as in those days, that wrung my heart. It was unnatural. It was absurd. But how could I help it, being beside myself?

Then, when I could cry no more, a feeling of weariness came upon me, and I could think of past happiness no more. And becoming more rational, I wondered why my heart was so heavy, and tried to explain it. 'It is broken—my heart,' I said to myself. 'That is why it feels so dull and heavy—it is dead within me.'

My imagination went from the past to the future. 'I have been sinned against, and have sinned in the highest degree,' I thought. 'I am dishonoured and degraded; I have murder on my conscience; I am stained with crime; I am worthless; and I can never hope to recover my innocence. There is nothing to hope for in all the wide world. The blue sky and birds and flowers will mock me. I cannot face those who have loved me. There is no more love for me; all is dead. Women will shrink from me; men will point at me; some will scorn me; others will shun me. I can never kiss a little child.'

Then a flood of tears came again, for I loved children. I who thought to have children of my own, to press them to my bosom, and hush them to sleep, to teach them to love their father—their father, whose life I had taken!

'All my hopes are gone—all ! Nothing can restore them. Will people see what I am by my face ? Yes. What does it matter ? I have nothing to hope for. Shall I become callous and vile ? Perhaps. It will make no difference what becomes of me ; I can sink no lower. I have nothing to dread. In a little while I shall be dead ; one cannot live with a broken heart.' A gleam of satisfaction came with this reflection, and I repeated again and again, 'In a little while I shall be dead ; one cannot live with a broken heart.'

I made no opposition to obeying Mr. Everleigh. When the carriage stopped at the railway-station, I got down, but I would not touch Mr. Everleigh's hand. That was loathsome to me.

He read what was in my mind, and when we were in the railway-carriage, he allowed me to sit alone at the end of the compartment farthest from him. He spoke—I do not know what he said. I did not reply ; I was broken down.

It was at Chatham, I think, that we stopped. I threw myself on the bed in the hotel without taking off my clothes, and I slept. It seems strange to me that I could sleep. But I have heard that men sleep knowing that they are to be executed the next morning. I was glad to sleep. When I was called in the morning, I closed my eyes and tried to sleep again. The girl came in, and said, touching my shoulder :

'If you don't get up now, miss, you will lose the train.'

It was strange that people should know I was not a wife.

'Must I catch the train ?' I asked stupidly.

'Yes, miss,' she replied, in a tone of authority—like one who addresses a child or an invalid. 'You must get up now. The fly's at the door, and the gentleman is waiting.'

I rose, and brushed back my hair with my hands.

'I've brought your coffee, miss,' she pursued, still in the same authoritative tone. 'You must drink it ; it will do you good.'

I did as I was told to do, while the girl straightened my crushed bonnet, and tried to make me presentable. Then she bade me put on a new waterproof that I had never seen before, which, I suppose, Mr. Everleigh had bought for me that morning.

Downstairs the master of the hotel bowed to me as I passed to the fly, and the maid curtsied to me also.

‘They would not do that,’ said I to myself, ‘if they knew I had murdered the man I loved.’

Again we were seated in a train—Mr. Everleigh at one end of the compartment, and I at the other. He had a packet of papers and books, bought on the platform. He offered them to me. I shook my head, and turned away.

At Dover we went from the train on to a boat. There were few passengers. Men were busy with the luggage. The steam was hissing from the funnel; a bell rang. The sea was bright; a breeze had sprung up and cleared the air; the sun shone. I sat on the seat Mr. Everleigh placed for me, and never moved until he came up, some time after the boat had started, and said:

‘You had better go down. It is cold; there is a good fire in the ladies’ cabin.’

Then I went below, and when the stewardess told me I had better lie down, I lay down. I tried to sleep again. I felt it would be pleasant to sleep and forget.

My thoughts were hovering about Valentine, but I would not think of that, and began counting whenever I found them approaching nearer to him. How I wished to sleep and forget!

‘He is dead, he is dead, he is dead!’ the engines seemed to reiterate. I strove to think of pleasant things; what was there pleasant to think of? What had brightened the dull surroundings last night? Suddenly the words came back to my recollection:

‘In a little while I shall be dead. No one can live with a broken heart.’

Was that true or false? If my heart was broken, why did I still live? And if I still lived with a dead heart, might I not continue to live—always carrying my burden? The water against the side of the boat pleased my ear. I listened to it, and thought how cool it would be to my burning head; how one might forget, lying beneath the waters, where it was all calm and beautiful, like the home of the water-maiden in Hans Andersen’s sweetest story.

There was no other lady passenger on board; the stewardess had left the cabin, seeing that I did not need her.

I got up, and with a careful step made my way up the winding stairs. Half-way up I caught sight of Mr. Ever-

leigh seated near the head of the stairs smoking a cigar. My spirits fell, and I retraced my steps and lay down again.

‘He is dead, he is dead, he is dead!’ the engines repeated. To avoid that, I tried to make out what the water whispered. I seemed to hear the voice of the water-maiden telling how at the end of a hundred years they became sea-foam and forgot all the past.

The stewardess came to tell me that we had reached Ostend, and that it was time to go upon deck.

I went up. The passengers were collected in a little knot against the gangway on the bridge; but Mr. Everleigh was at the head of the stairs to meet me.

There was no one at the end of the boat but us. On our left was the pier; on the right was the open harbour. There was a seat against the side, and the bulwarks were only a little height above it.

We went towards the gangway; we had to ascend a few steps to get upon the bridge. There was no room for two to go up side by side. Mr. Everleigh went first. He was three steps in advance, when a wild hope fluttered into my breast, and I looked back. That end of the boat was still deserted. I did not hesitate. In a moment I ran back, put my foot on the seat, sprung from that on to the bulwark; and crying to myself, ‘God forgive me for all the wrong I have done,’ and with a great hope that I should presently see Valentine as I had seen him when we met before, I leapt downwards into the sea.

CHAPTER XXXI.

FROM THE NARRATIVE OF THOMAS CRAIK.

‘Two half-crowns and a door-key for risking your life to get that letter is not much, Thomas,’ I said to myself, as my eyes followed the gig with Mr. Bullen in it speeding towards Barstow. I had not foreseen the difficulty in getting a warrant, but I felt that the parson was right, and that it would be more expeditious to go to London for help than to seek it from a country magistrate. I regretted, however, that I had not myself taken the letter to London, where Mr. Grote, the solicitor, would have given me another fifty

pounds for my service had I asked it. Still, there was the possibility that help might not come from London, and in that case I should have to make an effort to save Mrs. Norman unaided. If I succeeded in doing that I should strengthen my claim upon Captain Bromley's gratitude. In any case I was certain of being rewarded sooner or later for the risk I had run.

With this consolatory reflection I turned into an alehouse and called for a breakfast of eggs and bacon.

I dared not go near the Moat before nightfall, so I resolved to see if there were any letters for me at the post-office at Faulcondale, and to hang about there during the day, that I might know if Dr. Bullen returned from London.

I started off as soon as I had finished my breakfast; a baker overtaking me on the road gave me a lift in his cart. In the course of conversation he told me he was a Manx man, and gave me a description of Douglas, where his mother kept a lodging-house.

At Faulcondale we shared a pint of ale and parted. I went to the post-office, and found a letter from Miss Norton that had been lying there four days. My friend wrote in rather a snappish tone—she could not understand my long silence, she thought it was but fair that we should come to an understanding, etc.; but that which really interested me was the information that Captain Bromley was to marry Miss Howard on the eighteenth, 'and as this,' she added, 'is entirely due to my influence upon Mrs. Bromley, I think I ought to be made acquainted with the purpose you had in view when you asked me to bring it about.'

I put the letter in my pocket, and walked to the churchyard, that I might sit down and think it out without fear of interruption.

'The eighteenth,' thought I, as I walked along, 'why, that is this very day! In a few hours they will be married—that is, if Dr. Bullen does not arrive in time to upset the arrangement by producing Mrs. Norman's letter and hurrying Captain Bromley off to her rescue.' Then I bitterly reproached myself for having neglected to keep myself better informed of Miss Norton's movements. I had underrated her ability. That was my fault. If the marriage were prevented I had no one to blame but myself. For, of course, had I got Miss Norton's letter before, I should have

kept back Mrs. Norman's communication until all possibility of impeding the marriage was removed.

How often have I found that the very best laid plans are rendered ineffectual by the merest accident which could not be foreseen !

It is only in books and dramas that no hitches of this kind occur to upset the development of a clever scheme.

'Well, now what will happen?' I asked myself, as I sat down in a secluded part of the graveyard after once more reading Miss Norton's letter. 'In the first place, if Dr. Bullen finds Captain Bromley before he has taken Miss Howard to the church,' I answered, 'they will arrive at Barstow at 2.15, and they'll pass here about three, and then things will be neither better nor worse than they were before I started the parson off. If they do not pass here between three and four it will be pretty certain that the marriage has taken place.

'In that case the whole position of affairs will be altered. What can Dr. Norman do? Nothing. The game is lost to him. While Miss Howard was Miss Howard, he could hope by getting rid of his wife to come between Captain Bromley and Miss Howard in some way known to himself, make Miss Howard his wife, and profit by the stolen letter.' But Miss Howard being married, that possibility was out of the question. He could only succeed in realizing the quarter of a million by killing Captain Bromley as well as Mrs. Norman. Was it likely he would go to such an extreme as that? Knowing his character, I thought it improbable. His schemes might be as villainous as those of Macbeth or Richard the Third, but they were not backed up by the courage of those men. He could rid himself of his wife with impunity by forcing her to commit suicide; but he could not play that game with a man like Valentine Bromley. No; Dr. Norman valued his life too well to risk it by murder. He could withhold the fortune from Mrs. Bromley, but he could do no more. He certainly could not use it himself. Miss Howard married, that draft would be worth no more to him than waste-paper.

It struck me that before long perhaps he would be glad to come to terms with me, blundering idiot or not, and sell me the stolen letter for a fair price.

I began to speculate already on the price I should offer—

six hours before I could tell whether Miss Howard was married or not.

I kept out of the way, not wishing to encounter Eliza, who could be of no service to me, and I did not trouble to reply to Miss Norton's letter for a similar reason. I had got that young lady's secret, and did not intend that she should know mine. If she had brought about the marriage, it was as much as I wanted of her. I could not see how she could be of further use to me. As for her secret, she was welcome, so far as I was concerned, to do what she pleased with it. It was a trumpery family affair concerning Mrs. Norman that could not be turned to any profitable account, according to my judgment at that time. It may be said that I was selfish: I dare say I was. I don't pretend to be perfect; my business here is to tell the truth.

Two o'clock struck; I watched the Barstow road with anxiety; it struck three, and then I said to myself: 'It's all right. The parson has missed them: Dr. Norman has lost the race!'

I went to the alehouse, from which I could see everything that passed along the Barstow road, and ate a good dinner. At four o'clock I felt it was no longer necessary to watch, and I went into a rick-yard a little off the road, where I lay down under a haystack and fell asleep in a few minutes.

I intended to rest no more than a couple of hours, that I might get to the Moat as soon as it fell dark; but I overslept myself—which was not to be wondered at, considering the little rest I had taken the night before—and when I woke it was quite dark—past eight a good bit. I bought a quarter of a pound of cheese and a twopenny loaf, and with these in my pocket I turned towards Beauchamp Moat.

It was all very well to say 'By-and-by I shall make terms with Dr. Norman and get the reward offered by Professor Schlobach for the lost letter.' But I could not afford to neglect my present advantages, and rely solely upon the possibility of future gains. I must save Mrs. Norman if possible. If I saw no other way of helping her, I would convey another message the same way as before, letting her know that Captain Bromley was coming to her rescue. That would certainly deter her from an immediate act of violence upon herself.

I was laying all this out in my mind, and had covered

about a mile and a half of the distance between Faulcondale and the Moat, when rounding a bend in the road I perceived two flaming eyes in the darkness before me. I stopped, startled by this sudden apparition. I had heard no one—I had met no one; at this hour the old London road was absolutely deserted. In a moment, however, I recognised that the eyes were nothing but carriage lamps; the distance was yet too great for the sound of approach over that thickly grass-grown road to be heard.

Who would come along that road at this time? No one but persons from the Moat. The eyes grew bigger, I could hear the screech of the springs and the thud of the horse's hoofs on the turf.

Feeling my way to the edge of the road—for I could see nothing after looking at the bright lamps—I tore through the brush, and crouched down, that the light might not fall on me as the vehicle drew near.

Looking from my shelter, I could make out nothing but the steaming of the horse's breath, some bits of the harness and the two lights; but presently I saw the glow of a cigar in the blackness between the lamps, and the next moment, the vehicle being quite close, a woman leant forward into the light to whip the slow horse. It was Martha, and I concluded at once by the glow of the lighted cigar I had seen that Dr. Norman was seated at her side. Well enough I knew the old gig as it passed with its rusty leather hood.

Reckoning the time elapsed since I left Faulcondale, and the time necessary for the gig to reach Barstow, I decided that Dr. Norman was going to London by the train that left Barstow at 9.45.

Here was my opportunity. It would be eleven before Martha got back, and if, as I calculated, it was now about a quarter to nine, I should by making haste have fully an hour to get Mrs. Norman out of the house before Martha returned.

I hurried on, and my eyes growing again accustomed to the partial obscurity, I presently broke into a run, anxious to make the most of this accidental advantage.

I got to the Moat out of breath. Not a light was visible. This surprised me, for I expected Mrs. Norman to be looking out for the promised rescue.

Had Dr. Norman taken her away? Was she sitting between him and Martha when they passed? I put my fingers in my mouth and whistled shrilly. The dog responded

by barking furiously. I waited some time, and I fancied, when the dog for a moment ceased to bark, I heard a faint voice calling from the interior of the court.

As I dared not pass the gate for fear of the dog, I went up into the wood, fetched the board, and having crossed the moat, entered the house by the door on the ruined side. Pushing aside the ivy from the window looking on to the courtyard, I caught sight of Mrs. Norman's pale face standing out against the dark square of her opened window. She saw the movement of the foliage, and cried :

'I am here!' and then she added, seeing my face as I pushed the ivy still further away, 'I am alone. No one is in the house. Is it you, Valentine?'

'No,' I answered; 'but all the same, you shall be saved. I am Peters. Can you get down to the front of the house?'

'No,' she replied; 'I am locked in.'

'I will come to you,' I said.

I went to the corner where I kept my things, got my lantern, and lit it. With that I crept through the hopper into the straw loft, made my way through the south wing and got into the north. Then I proceeded with more caution, casting the light to the right and left, on the floor and up above, lest Dr. Norman's devilish ingenuity should have provided a surprise for me. I encountered no obstacle, and got to Mrs. Norman's chamber door without accident.

As I have said, the doors were not furnished with locks; they were fastened with latches and bolts on the inside; they opened inwards in the ordinary way. Just below the latch on the outside was an iron handle shaped like a D, for pulling-to the door; through this Dr. Norman had thrust a stout piece of quartering, the ends of which extended beyond the door-post on either side, effectually preventing the opening of the door from the inside. But nothing was more easy from where I stood. I had just to draw out the piece of quartering, lift the latch, and the door opened.

Mrs. Norman had lit a lamp. She was standing by the door dressed in her bonnet and mantle ready to go. She caught my hand, and pressing it, said in feverish haste, but under her breath, as though she still feared to be heard :

'You won't forsake me, will you?'

'No,' I answered; 'I should not be here now unless I meant to save you.'

'Heaven bless you!' she whispered, still pressing my

fingers in her hot thin hand. 'You are the only friend I have. All the rest have forsaken me—all—all!'

'No,' I said, 'your friends have not forsaken you. They would have taken you away from here if the law would have allowed them.'

'And because the law would not let them they suffer me to stay here and lose my reason—my life. Are they friends?—No!'

Her vehemence alarmed me. 'You must try to be calm,' I said; 'your escape depends upon that.'

'I am calm. Do not be afraid,' she answered quickly. 'Do not take any notice of my look now. I know I am excited. I feel my face burning; my hands are hot, and I tremble. But who could be otherwise at such a moment as this? I will do as you bid me do; see, I am obedient; only let us get away.'

'Yes, we will go,' said I, making a step towards the door.

'Where?' she asked, as she took up the hand-lamp and followed me.

'To Orwell; see, Dr. Bullen has given me the key of his house.'

'No,' she cried, 'no, we will not go there. I will trust no one who has called himself my friend—no one but you.'

'You must be reasonable,' said I, stopping.

'I am reasonable'; she laid her hand upon my arm and spoke entreatingly; 'I am quite reasonable. Think what it is you propose—to take me to a place where first of all my husband will seek me—to put me in the hands of those who care more for the law than for me. If they will not take me from this prison because of the law, will they not for the same reason give me up when my husband demands me? Am I unreasonable?'

'What you say is reasonable,' I answered. 'If you think it will be better to go to London—to your mother's—'

'No,' she said, interrupting me, 'my friends must not know that I have left this house. They would give me up. I will not trust them. My husband would force them to give me up. You do not know how cunning he is.'

'Yes, I do,' said I.

'Then you must see that what I say is right—my friends must not know I have escaped.'

This dialogue did not occupy two minutes. We both

spoke hastily, for I was as anxious to get away as she. But I paused again when she said this. I saw she had made up her mind to take a certain course, notwithstanding her profession of obedience to my direction, and that it would be useless to try and move her in a contrary direction while sustained by this feverish excitement.

‘Let us go—let us go,’ said she, drawing me by the arm; ‘why are you waiting?’

‘Why, the fact is, ma’am,’ I replied, ‘I am considering ways and means. If you won’t make your escape known to your friends we can’t ask them for money, and without that I don’t see how we are to dodge Dr. Norman when he begins to hunt for us.’

‘That is quite true—I did not think of it. I have a few trinkets that we can sell—not many, but they will keep us until I can work for my living. For I am going to work, Peters; I will take a house-servant’s place—anything.’

While saying this she had returned to her room, I following, and still talking, she hastily collected what articles of jewellery she could find there and handed them over to me to take care of. Finding a leather bag, I suggested the advisability of her taking a change of clothes. She collected some things and packed them away.

‘I have still something else in my desk downstairs,’ she added, taking up the lamp.

‘Good—but we shall not need the lamp. I have my lantern, that is enough; the other light might discover us if Martha should return before her time.’

She hesitated a moment, then blew out the light.

We went downstairs into the sitting-room, where she opened her desk and sought what she wanted; meanwhile, I glanced to the right and left from the window, and seeing the way quite clear, resolved to go out by the gateway if possible, as being more convenient for Mrs. Norman than the way I had come.

‘That is all I have,’ said Mrs. Norman, putting another case into my hand. ‘Now which way shall we go?’

‘If we can we will go by the gateway, but we must see first where the dog is.’

The moment I opened the door, which gave entrance from the gateway, the dog leapt forward with the utmost fury, choking himself with the violent strain upon his collar.

Something to which the kennel was attached gave way; I heard the thing rattle over the cobble stones, and the next instant the beast's claws were tearing at the doorstep to get a hold for further entrance. In another moment he would have been in the room and upon us. Dragging Mrs. Norman with me, I retreated into the passage, and I don't think I breathed again until the door was shut between us and the detestable animal. As there was now no way of escape except by the ruined wing, we retraced our steps upstairs, along the passage, and through the empty rooms into the straw loft. Here, there being no further need for concealing my means of approach, I took out a couple of planks from the partition to enable Mrs. Norman to pass, and then we descended the rotten stairs to the basement.

'Are we going out that way?' she asked, as I opened the door.

'Yes,' I answered, 'as soon as I have found another board to cross by.'

'While you are doing that I will go back,' said she; 'I have forgotten something.'

'But you cannot go without a light,' I said, as she turned in the darkness to grope her way up the treacherous stairs: 'wait, I will go with you.'

'No, I must go alone. Find the board and then lend me your lantern.'

I was getting fidgety; what with one thing and another a good deal of time had been occupied. However, it would only make matters worse by waiting to argue with a woman in Mrs. Norman's state of mind, so I set to work and got out a piece of timber that would bridge the moat to the centre pier, from which I could throw out the other plank as usual. When I told her I had got what I wanted, she took the lantern, and begging me to stay where I was, went to the stairs and ascended rapidly. The dog barked with redoubled fury. I thought he was conscious of her movements.

Although the moon was hidden by clouds there was enough light for me to see the pier standing out of the middle of the water, and I was just stooping down to lay hold of the timber when the jingle of a horse's bit struck my ear. I stepped out on to the board and glanced towards the front of the house. There stood the gig.

Despite the pitch darkness within, I ran up the stairs like a cat and dashed through the south wing and along the west passage to Mrs. Norman's room. It was empty. The furious barking of the dog suggested that she might have returned to the sitting-room. Without a moment's delay I ran downstairs; the sitting-room lay to the right, but coming to the foot of the staircase I caught sight of a ray of light to the left. She had gone, then, towards her husband's laboratory. She had heard my step and turned, hence the ray of light from the lantern. I ran along the passage and found her in the disused lumber-room, which had served me as a workshop. She had drawn back as if to escape discovery, and stood against the bin in which I had stored the shavings and chips. The lighted lantern was in her left hand, her right was behind her.

'What is it?' she gasped, seeing my alarm.

'Your husband,' I cried. As I spoke something fell from her right hand into the bin. There was the sound of breaking glass and a strong smell of paraffin. I know now that it was the lamp she had fetched from her bedchamber, but I was too agitated then to make inquiries. 'There is no time to look for anything else; come along quick, for heaven's sake!' I cried. 'Martha has returned, and Dr. Norman with her, for aught I know.'

The fear of him seemed to paralyze her. She stood leaning against the case for support and trembling like one in an ague. Leaving her there with the lantern on the floor before her, I ran to the side window and looked out. I could see through the gateway. Someone was standing by the wicket with one of the gig lamps throwing the light into the gateway. The dog stood out in black relief.

'Is he there?' gasped Mrs. Norman, coming to my side with the lantern hidden under her mantle.

'I can't see,' I replied; 'any way, we must go back at once. If he is there we must get away before he can find out that we are gone.'

Once more we made our way back to the ruined wing. When we got down to the door I crept along the plank over the moat and peered out sideways. Martha had put the gig lamp back in its place, and stood there with her hands on her hips in a brown study. It was clear that she had returned alone and dared not pass through the gateway for

fear of the dog. Presently, as if she had come to a decision, she suddenly went to the horse's head and began to unharness him.

I crept back and told Mrs. Norman of the situation of things, assuring her that there was no danger while we remained quietly where we were. When I returned to my point of observation, I found that Martha had taken the horse out of the shafts and was walking him towards the fir-trees by the bridle.

She came back, took the rug out, wrapped it closely round her head and shoulders, got into the gig, and fastened down the apron.

'It is all right,' said I, returning to Mrs. Norman; 'Martha has made herself comfortable in the gig. In a quarter of an hour she will be asleep, and we can start.'

We waited impatiently for some time, and then I once more crept along the board.

'Is it all right?' whispered Mrs. Norman from behind me.

'Yes.'

'And we can go in a few minutes?'

'Yes, we can start now.'

I went back on my hands and knees as I had advanced, for there was still the timber to arrange from the pier to the other side of the Moat before Mrs. Norman could cross. When I stood up and turned about I could see nothing.

'Where are you, ma'am?' I asked. There was no answer. She had gone back for the thing she wished to take with her. 'It ought to be something precious,' thought I, 'for her to think of it at this time.'

However, I had something else to occupy my thoughts. I got the timber on my shoulder, carried it across the board to the pier, and setting one end against my joined feet, I let it drop forward; the other end fell just as I wished on the edge of the moat. I walked over it to feel that it was secure, gave a glance at the gig to see that Martha had not moved, and then, satisfied that all was safe, I returned to the house. Almost immediately afterwards I caught sight of the light above thrown by the lantern, and Mrs. Norman came down. She had nothing in her hand but the lantern. 'Oh, oh,' thought I, 'it's too precious to hand over to me!'

The moon, though still overclouded, was higher; it was

fairly light. Mrs. Norman said she could see to cross the planks without light, so I put the lantern in my pocket, took the leather bag in my left hand, and giving my right to Mrs. Norman, led her safely across the narrow bridge. Two minutes afterwards we were in the shadow of the firs.

Now, while we had been waiting for the moment when we might quit the Moat in safety, I had been casting about in my mind for a place of safety to which I might take Mrs. Norman, and the conversation I had had with the baker that morning recurred to me. 'Everyone is leaving Douglas now,' he had said; 'the island is deserted.' It seemed to me that this place would just suit us. Mrs. Norman had made no suggestion; she hurried along by my side in silence. When I proposed that we should go to the Isle of Man, she said:

'I don't care where we go, so that I may not be discovered. If you think it is safe, I am quite willing to go to the Isle of Man.'

'Very well, ma'am,' said I, 'we will go to Douglas.' That is all that passed between us until we were past Faulcondale, on the road to Barstow. Every now and then she turned round and looked behind her, and then mended her pace. That was natural. I could understand her fear of pursuit. We had nearly reached the top of the hill beyond Faulcondale, when, after looking behind her once more, she stopped, laying one hand on my arm and pointing with the other over the gray valley. Far away I saw a bright patch of light; the clouds over there were deeply flushed, and the glow extended faintly almost to the clouds above our head. I gave an exclamation of surprise.

'That is the Moat,' said she. 'My friends will never know that I escaped; they will think I am burnt.'

Now I understood why she had gone back, why she had that lamp in her hand when I discovered her, and why she had a second time returned to the west wing.

I was fatigued, having walked a matter of fourteen miles in all since starting out from Faulcondale. I should have been glad to sit down and watch the burning of the distant house. I told Mrs. Norman that if she felt tired she could safely rest awhile, but she would not hear of it.

'Let us get away, far away,' she said; 'give me the bag, it is my turn to carry it.'

So we trudged on to Barstow. We met not a soul on the way, and when we got to the station the door was locked, and there was no light to be seen except in the signal post; the gate of the hotel stable-yard was bolted also. I could find no shelter for Mrs. Norman; for my own part, I was so fagged out I could have gone to sleep leaning against a wall. Mrs. Norman seemed unable to rest in one place for two minutes together.

For a couple of weary hours we dragged about the neighbourhood of the station. Then, hearing footsteps approach, I took Mrs. Norman a little distance from the road to escape observation, and there we waited and watched.

It was a railway porter; he opened the station door and went inside whistling. Every sound fell distinctly on our ears—his footsteps, the turning of a key, the scratching of a match, the banging of a door. Presently a light appeared, and he came out and stuck a lamp in the case outside the station, then he went in and lit another in the booking-office; after that we heard him jump down on the line and cross the gravelled way; then he lit a couple of lamps on the up-platform. That was satisfactory.

‘Shall we go in and get our tickets?’ asked Mrs. Norman.

‘No, not yet; we must wait till the last moment. We don’t want to give the porter anything to talk about.’

We waited, Mrs. Norman shivering with excitement. An electric bell tinkled, the signal changed with a rattle, the porter still whistled by fits and starts, going from one part of the station to another. A door in the village banged, and soon after fresh footsteps came briskly along the road. A man went into the station; we heard the jingling of keys, the opening of a door and the manipulation of a ticket-stamping machine, then voices in the office talking.

‘Isn’t it time?’ asked Mrs. Norman.

‘No, we will wait until they have done talking.’

We waited until the voices ceased to speak; a door clattered, and the porter began again to whistle on the platform.

‘Now,’ said I, and we went softly to the station and into the booking-office, where Mrs. Norman stood in the dark while I went up to the pay place. The young man was leaning with his face on his hand, amusing himself by jobbing a penknife in the desk.

‘Two, Liverpool, second,’ said I.

He drew out the tickets, stamped them and handed them to me, telling me to change at Preston. As he spoke he bent down to look through the hole, curious to know who it was going on at that hour. I kept my head out of the light as well as I could. But he was not satisfied, and as Mrs. Norman and I slipped out on to the platform we heard the handle of the office door turn. I told Mrs. Norman to bend her shoulders, for I felt sure he had come to the door to satisfy his curiosity. She did as I told her to do, and we crossed the line. Just then we heard the train coming. The porter came along swinging his lamp; he was inquisitive also. When he took the two tickets to nip them he turned the lamp towards Mrs. Norman, who stood a few paces from me.

I felt we had done wrong to take that train, and that we ought to have waited until daylight, when we should have excited no curiosity.

However, nothing happened to prevent us getting to Liverpool and taking the boat from there to Douglas. We arrived at the island in safety that evening—though I doubt if we should have arrived there at all had I known beforehand what it is like to be seasick.

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE NARRATIVE OF THOMAS CRAIK CONTINUED.

It was dark when we arrived. We stopped at the hotel opposite the Grand Theatre. There were no other visitors there. Mrs. Norman was asked to write her name in the office book. She wrote as I had instructed her, ‘Mrs. Beach and servant.’

The next morning after breakfast we went out to seek apartments, and, naturally, we took the broad road facing the bay. We met no one in the whole length of the esplanade. It was absolutely deserted. The windows of the lower floors in the row of fine houses were shuttered; those above were dismantled of blind and curtain.

‘We have come to the right place for seclusion,’ I said to Mrs. Norman. We walked back the way we had come and

observed remarkable signs of activity. Shutters were being thrown open, curtains hastily put up, and cards with 'rooms to let' hung up. We had been seen. I saw that I had made a great mistake to go along there with Mrs. Norman gaping up at the empty houses.

From one end of the esplanade to the other it would be known that two visitors had arrived at this extraordinary season for visits. It was like advertising our arrival.

However, it seemed so unlikely that Dr. Norman would suspect and trace us to the island that I did not give much importance to this fact—less than I ought to, no doubt. It was one more of those slight errors which have so often involved me in their serious consequences.

We turned up the hill, and in a side street found a quiet house with cheerful rooms at the back looking over the bay. These suited Mrs. Norman; a garret suited me.

Sea-side lodging-house keepers are not very fastidious about their customers—there is no nonsense about references or anything of that kind, especially in an off season, so the landlady was content to let Mrs. Norman be reticent as to the cause of her coming to the Isle of Man; but the good old Manxwoman, having nothing better to do, spent a good deal of time in pumping me. I was never at a loss to invent a story, and indulged her in a good long one—only taking care to keep in mind the salient points that I might not contradict myself. These points were that Mr. Beach was captain of the *City of Bristol*, a merchant sailing ship, which left St. Katherine's docks on September the 14th, on a voyage to China. Mrs. Beach, I told her, had been greatly cut up by his departure, and had been recommended by her medical man to recruit her health and spirits in the Isle of Man. To account for my accompanying her, I made out that I was a poor second cousin owing much to Captain Beach's charity. The old lady was very pleased with my facts and fancies, and taught me to play cribbage, at which interesting game I invariably won small sums from her.

I had fully expected that when the excitement was over Mrs. Norman would be knocked up by the fatigue and mental strain to which she had been subjected. But this was not the case. The freedom and sense of security compensated her for what she had undergone, and every day she grew brighter and stronger, so that at the end of a couple of

weeks she looked younger and better than ever I had seen her. I was glad to see this, for I felt sure it would be to my advantage when the time came for Captain Bromley to show his recognition of my services.

I managed to dispose of Mrs. Norman's trinkets to advantage, and this, with the funds I had, enabled me to go on comfortably; but I saw that before long we should need more money, and this I hinted to her one day when we were alone. She listened to me with great calmness, she being now as reasonable as most women, and this emboldened me to suggest that we should in a roundabout way communicate with Captain Bromley, and ask his assistance.

'No,' she said, 'I will not do that. I have no claim upon him. I am not related to him in any way. He is married. It is not fair to lay a burden on his shoulders which I am now quite capable of supporting myself.'

I knew she had a claim upon him. I felt sure that Mrs. Bromley had made some provision for her also. But I did not think it necessary to tell her yet of the secret discovered by Esther Norton.

'I must look about for some occupation,' she said cheerfully.

I felt that she might look about a long while on the Isle of Man for occupation without finding it. But I kept this to myself, and let her buy Manx papers and study the advertisements without comment. Here was another oversight. A week afterwards she pointed out an advertisement in the *Manxman*:

'A LADY, aged twenty-six, of good education, seeks moderately remunerative occupation in Douglas. Address, Mrs. Beach, 22, Sackville Street, Douglas.'

She had inserted this advertisement without consulting me, and it was just the sort of thing Dr. Norman would look for if he happened to be in pursuit of us.

That was on Saturday night. On Sunday morning Mrs. Norman went to church; I took a walk to the Head. It was wonderfully clear and bright. I saw the Cumberland hills distinctly. When I got home about a quarter past one, the landlady met me in the passage.

'I don't know what's the matter with your missis, young man,' she said, 'but she came in looking like a ghost, and I

couldn't get a word out of her. She's gone upstairs, and shut herself in the drawing-room. You'd better go and see what's amiss, for the leg o' mutton is biling to rags, and the turnips has been mashed this half-hour.'

I ran upstairs and tapped at the door. There was no answer. I tapped again; then Mrs. Norman spoke in a low voice, tremulous with fear.

'Who is there?' she asked.

'I, ma'am.'

She unlocked the door and opened it. Her appearance was quite changed, and recalled to my mind the morning we fled from Barstow, when she stood in the ghastly, flickering light of the station lamp. There was the same pallor in her cheeks, and wild, hunted look in her eyes.

'I have seen him. He is come to take me back,' she said, in a tone hardly above a whisper.

'Who?' I said.

'Norman—my husband.' Then shutting the door and turning the key, she grasped my hand, and in a tone of supplication said, 'You won't betray me, you won't betray me? You will save me? You will still be good to me? Oh! you will be rewarded if you do this for a helpless, unhappy woman!'

'No fear, ma'am,' said I; 'I ain't got you away from him to let him get you back again. Did he see you?'

'No; I had my veil on, and I kept beside two ladies who had lent me their book at church; there were many people. He stood on the other side of the way looking at the stream of people, but I feel sure he did not recognise me.'

'It wouldn't much matter if he had. He cannot touch you here—the House of Keys won't let him.'

I said this to encourage her, but without much faith in the House of Keys.

'What you must do is to keep indoors for a few days, and give the old woman downstairs nothing to talk about. So I advise you to let me bring you up your dinner at once. I'll explain all to the landlady. And you must eat and keep up your strength and courage in case of need.'

'I will do as you tell me. I will try and eat. Oh, heaven bless you, my friend!'

I went down and told the old woman a story which satisfied her mind; and then I took the tray upstairs and laid the table as usual.

Mrs. Norman tried to smile and look brave, and seated herself to eat, though with what appetite one can imagine. It was piteous to see how anxious she was to obey and conciliate me.

I went down to take my meal with the landlady. In the window of her parlour, which looked into the street, she had hung a card with 'Apartments to let' on it, in the hope that, having succeeded in catching one late visitor, she might get another.

While the good woman was gone to the cellar to draw a jug of ale, I whipped down the announcement, and slipped it out of sight behind the dresser. But for all this I was by no means easy in my mind. If Dr. Norman had traced us to Douglas he would not leave until he knew whether we had left or not. And then that unfortunate advertisement in the *Manxman* was a clue which he would certainly find and follow up. With these thorns rankling in my side I had much to do to keep up a flow of small talk and avert the landlady's observation.

As soon as the church-bell began to clang in the afternoon the old woman went out in her best, and I went upstairs to keep Mrs. Norman company. As we were sitting there, both pretending to be at our ease, while thinking at the same time of the possibility of Dr. Norman tracking us down, a ring at the door-bell stopped our conversation abruptly, and took my breath away at the same time.

'It is he—it is he!' gasped Mrs. Norman, clasping her hands in terror.

'So much the better,' said I, as fiercely as I could; 'he shall know that he has somebody besides a helpless woman to deal with. Lock the door and don't fear.'

But what in the world I was to do if it was Dr. Norman at the door I could not tell. I had no wish to measure my strength with his. Some vague notion of cutting the bell wire and letting him pull at the bell until he was tired out occurred to me, but before putting the notion into execution I ran down to the kitchen, where one could obtain a side-long view of the doorstep from the window. To my great relief I discovered that the visitor was a little boy of eight or ten years. I went up at once and opened the door.

'What do you want?' I asked.

'Want to see gran ma,' replied the boy.

'Come in,' said I; 'grandma will be home presently.'

I was glad to get him into the house, for I felt perfectly sure Dr. Norman would call—his presence in the neighbourhood showed that he had the clue to his wife's whereabouts—and I thought that the little boy might be of service. It is wrong to tell lies, and improper to make a child the instrument of duplicity, but I hope I shall be forgiven for my proceedings in this case.

'Your grandma has gone with a lady and gentleman who have been lodging here to see them off by the half-past three o'clock boat,' I said.

'I know my way to the boat; shall I go and find granny?' said the child.

'No,' I replied, 'you might fall in the water. You stay here, and I'll cut you out a boat.'

He agreed readily to this proposition, and I got a stick of firewood and began to cut out a boat, telling him from time to time that his grandmother had gone with her lodgers to see them off by the boat, in order to impress it upon his tender memory.

The kitchen was below the level of the road—from where I sat I could just see the legs of people passing along the pavement, and whenever I heard a footstep, which was not frequently, I took care to cast my eye that way.

It had just struck three when my ear caught the sound of steps on the pavement, and a minute afterwards I sighted a pair of legs in dark-gray trousers. They stopped just in front of the window. My heart went up into my mouth, for there was character in Dr. Norman down to his boots, and I was sure it was he outside there.

He moved on, and the next moment there was a 'driling, dring, ding,' at the little bell in the passage.

'There's someone at the door, Georgie,' I said; 'you can go and see who it is while I finish the boat. You know where your grandma is, if it's anyone to see her.'

'Yes, I know; you've told me free or four times,' replied the child, and then he ran upstairs. I followed to the foot and listened, holding my breath.

The door opened, and I heard Dr. Norman's voice—there was no mistaking it.

'Is Mrs. Beach at home?' he asked.

There was no answer. I thought the child had forgotten

his lesson already ; but evidently he did not understand the question, not knowing the name asked, for Dr. Norman put his question in another way.

‘Is the lady who lodges here at home?’ he asked.

‘Ve lodgers hes gone down to the half-past free boat, and gran’mover’s gone wiv ‘em to see ‘em off,’ replied Georgie.

‘What lodgers?’ asked Dr. Norman quickly.

‘Ve lady and genelman.’

No more was said. I heard a quick step outside, and then the door was slammed.

‘Which way did the gentleman go, Georgie?’ I asked.

‘Towards Souf Street. He looked at his watch, and off he went running.’

By South Street was the nearest way to the pier. Looking at the clock, I saw that Dr. Norman would just have time to get there before the boat started, and it was not likely he would stay behind, believing his wife to be in the ladies’ cabin.

I ran upstairs to Mrs. Norman, whom I found in a terrible state of agitation, and told her what had happened.

‘Heaven grant he may get there before the boat starts!’ she said.

‘Well,’ said I, ‘I almost hope he may not. If he misses it he will take the next boat, and may run all over England to find us ; but if he catches it, he will find before he’s half-way to Liverpool that we have cheated him.’

‘What then?’

‘What then, ma’am?—why, he’ll come back by the next boat.’

‘What is to be done?’ she asked. ‘Tell me what I am to do.’

‘Sit down, ma’am, and when you are calm enough to hold a pen, write a short note to Mrs. Brady, our landlady, saying we are compelled to leave at once ; enclose a sovereign, and then put on your bonnet. Meanwhile, with your permission, ma’am, I’ll be packing your bag.’

She carried out my instructions, and when we were all ready to go I took her letter downstairs into the kitchen, where Georgie had got hold of my knife, and was trying to finish the boat. I showed him the letter, and told him to give it to his grandmother when she came in, gave him a table-knife in exchange for mine, and bidding him be a good

boy and not cut himself, left him there hard at work. All this took but a short space of time; it was but little over the half-hour as we left Sackville Street, so that we had but slight fear of meeting Dr. Norman, even supposing he had not gone by the boat.

I took Mrs. Norman up the hill, and made my way round into the road opposite the Gaiety Theatre, and so got down to the railway-station, where by a lucky chance we had to wait but ten minutes for the train that took us on to Ramsay.

We went to the Royal Hotel at Ramsay, for I saw that it would not do to stay long there, where concealment was even less practicable than at Douglas. After tea I went into Mrs. Norman's sitting-room to know if she wanted anything. I found her in a state of intense nervous excitement, pacing up and down the room.

She said it was impossible for her to rest.

I asked her if she would take a walk by way of composing her mind. She refused.

'He will find me, and take me back. I am lost! I am lost!' she exclaimed, wringing her hands.

I tried to assure her there was nothing to fear, but my efforts were useless. She told me to leave her, saying that my presence would create suspicion, and I left her.

When I came downstairs the next morning from my room, the landlord called me into his private room, and, shutting the door, asked me who my mistress was, and what she had done.

I told him pretty much the same story I had given Mrs. Brady, and then asked why he had thought fit to question me upon her affairs.

'Well,' said he, 'the lady's been walking about her room the whole night long, and talking to herself the best part of the time. If she is out of her mind, I cannot take the responsibility of having her in my house, and if she is ill she had better see a doctor at once.'

I went to Mrs. Norman, and found her flushed and excited; she was not clear-headed. For a few minutes she would talk rationally, and then rambled off into subjects that had nothing to do with the question.

She told me that she had not slept, and could not rest. When I proposed that she should see a doctor she readily agreed—'Anything that will give me calm,' she said

I told the proprietor that my mistress felt unwell, and would see a doctor, and he sent at once for him.

The doctor came and saw Mrs. Norman; when he left her he said to me:

'You must communicate with Mrs. Beach's friends at once. Her brain has been overtaxed; there are strong symptoms of fever.'

'And if she has a fever, sir, what then?'

'What then! why, it may prove fatal, and she ought to have friends about her, and be properly nursed.'

Here was a pretty state of things: Dr. Norman on my heels, Mrs. Norman down with a fever, and our funds reduced to about four pounds ten. I had taken the lady under my protection, and should be held responsible for her safety. If she died there would be an end to the benefit for which I had been working; for in that case Captain Bromley would have nothing to be grateful for, but might, as likely as not, turn round and rate me for the course I had taken. There is no excuse for those who fail; no one thanks them for trying to succeed, or thinks how much they would have owed them had they succeeded.

As these reflections fell upon my mind, I resolved to communicate with Captain Bromley at once. I went to the post-office and wired off this message:

'From WILLIAM PETERS.		To CAPTAIN V. BROMLEY, Fairlawn, Wimbledon.
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'Mrs. Norman is here, dangerously ill. Dr. Norman is on our track. What shall I do?'

'Address, Thomas Waters, Royal Hotel, Ramsay.'

'When do you think I can get an answer to this?' I asked of the young man.

'Depends on the London office—an hour or two, perhaps.'

The whole morning passed, and no answer came, and for a very good reason—Captain Bromley was abroad, and Fairlawn was empty and shut up.

My anxiety increased, nor did it diminish as time went on, and no wonder, either, as I am about to show.

In the afternoon the doctor paid Mrs. Norman a second visit. He gave me a prescription to get made up at the chemist's.

'There is no improvement in the symptoms,' he said, 'none at all. I shall come again to-morrow morning, but if the medicine does no good and Mrs. Beach grows more unsettled towards the evening, you had better telegraph for me, and I will drive over if there is no train. There is my address.'

I took his card and read the address, 'Douglas.' It seemed as if everything was against us. In Dr. Norman's position, I myself should have gone first of all to the doctor in Douglas to know if he had any patients answering to his wife's description. While this thought was passing through my mind, the doctor added :

'By the way, have you been staying at Douglas?'

I said, 'Yes,' having no time to fabricate a story.

'That is odd. I was asked on Saturday if a lady in a delicate state of health, who had come lately to the island, attended by a man-servant, had sent for me. It may have been a friend of Mrs. Beach's who inquired—a spare, dark gentleman, with a close-cut beard.'

I assured him I had never seen such a person in my life ; but I saw that he went away unconvinced of my sincerity.

'If he meets Dr. Norman, he'll satisfy his curiosity on that point,' I said to myself, 'and it will be all up with us.'

I asked at what time the boat went out, and heard that there were only two a week, and that if we did not get away by the steamer the following morning, we should have to stay till Saturday.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE NARRATIVE OF THOMAS CRAIK CONTINUED.

THE more I considered the predicament in which we were placed, the more anxious I became to get away from Ramsay the next morning. It was no better than a trap in which we might starve or await the tender mercies of Dr. Norman. I was speculating on the advisability of wiring to Mr. Grote, the solicitor, when about half-past four a messenger from the post-office brought a telegram for Thomas Waters (the name I had taken). Here it is :

‘From
E. NORTON,
Woldhurst, Chislehurst,
Kent.

To THOMAS WATERS,
Royal Hotel,
Ramsay,
Isle of Man.

‘Captain Bromley is travelling with his wife in foreign parts. There is no one at Fairlawn. Your telegram has been sent on to me. If you can give satisfactory explanation I may help you.’

There were several reasons why I had not written to Esther Norton telling her of what had happened, but the principal one was that I had not seen the possibility of requiring her assistance. I lost no time, however, in replying to her.

‘I shall be in London to-morrow or the day after,’ I wired; ‘I will let you know when and where you can meet us. You shall have all the explanation you require.’

The chambermaid told me that my mistress had fallen asleep after taking the medicine prescribed by the doctor. I was glad of this, as favouring her departure the next day. I told the girl on no account to disturb Mrs. Beach, but to let me know when she did awake. She slept until seven; she sent for me the moment she awoke. Her excitement was not abated by the rest she had taken.

‘Has he come yet?’ she asked eagerly, the moment we were alone.

‘No, ma’am, and there’s no likelihood of his coming before mid-day to-morrow; by that time the sea will lie between him and us, if you are equal to making the voyage.’

‘Oh, I shall be strong enough—quite strong enough—I have slept. That has done me good. I am better.’

‘If you can sleep to-night there will be no reason for delaying our departure.’

She promised she would sleep—as if it were in her power to command sleep!—and I left her packing the bag as though she had not a moment to spare. When I told the hotel proprietor what the doctor had said about the probability of fever, he was as anxious that we should get out of his hotel as I was. He went with me to the quay to be sure about the hour of starting. We were told that the boat would start at eight. I knew the proprietor would not let me oversleep myself. The excellent man got us on board the next

morning before half-past seven. Mrs. Norman went below at once. I stayed on deck watching the pier until the boat steamed off; Dr. Norman was not then in sight, but I did not feel at ease until we were out of hail, and return was impossible.

We reached Barrow in the afternoon, and stayed there until 10.35, there being no earlier train. In the meantime I telegraphed to Esther Norton, telling her we should be at St. Pancras at 5.50 the next morning, and intimating that if I did not find her there I should seek her at Woldhurst, wherever that might be. I knew very little about sickness, but it was obvious to me that Mrs. Norman was getting worse instead of better. Her condition attracted the attention of the guard. At every stoppage he came to see us, offering what help he could. He procured a foot-warmer, and brought a thick overcoat to wrap round her, for she was terribly cold, and shivered to such a degree that it was painful to see her. She complained of thirst, and he brought her water to drink from time to time. This was very good and kind of the man; nevertheless, it filled me with apprehensions. It was the evidence Dr. Norman would seek when he learnt from the Douglas doctor or from the hotel proprietor at Ramsay the condition in which his wife had left the island, and would help him to trace us.

Early as it was when we reached St. Pancras, Esther Norton was on the platform to meet us. I saw her tall, lady-like figure as she stood under a gas lamp; I held out my hand as a signal, and she came to the door with the guard of the train.

Mrs. Norman was unable to stand; the guard and I had to lift her out of the carriage. A cab was called, and we got her into it. While the guard ran back to the carriage for the bag, Esther Norton and I held a hurried consultation.

‘Where is Captain Bromley?’ I asked.

‘Abroad; he will not return for a week.’

‘Where will he stay when he returns?’ Miss Norton pursed up her lips, and seemed disinclined to answer. ‘At Woldhurst?’ She made no reply. ‘Don’t be stupid,’ I said angrily. ‘If you won’t help Mrs. Norman, you can go about your business, and I’ll report your obstructiveness to Captain Bromley when he comes back. Besides, I can find out from Mr. Grote, the solicitor.’

At this moment the guard ran up with the bag; and, putting it in, spoke a few kind words to poor Mrs. Norman.

‘Quick,’ I said; ‘is it Woldhurst?’

‘Yes,’ she said, after a moment’s reluctance; and at my direction she took the seat beside Mrs. Norman. I gave the guard half a crown, and took the seat opposite to Mrs. Norman and Esther.

‘Where to?’ asked the station policeman, who had come up.

When I said Woldhurst, the cabman asked where that was. Esther said it was at Chislehurst. The cabman grumbled at the distance. The policeman wrote the name and the number of the cab in his note-book. Then I regretted that I had not mentioned some other place, and changed cabs to break the clue; but it was too late now. The mischief was done.

The rattling of the cab prevented any conversation between Esther and me; and I had enough to occupy my mind in arranging how to keep Mrs. Norman out of her husband’s hands during the next week.

I did not write to seek the assistance of Mr. Grote, for I had no high opinion of his practical ability in helping Mrs. Norman; moreover, I saw that the less aid the stronger my claim would be upon Captain Bromley’s gratitude. Half a dozen schemes presented themselves to my mind, for the jogging of the cab seemed to stimulate my wits; but at length I pitched upon one that seemed out and away better than the rest. I think it will be admitted that my scheme was an ingenious one. It appeared so to me, and I was impatient to get to our journey’s end, that I might test its practicability in conference with Esther Norton.

It was nearly nine o’clock when the jaded horse dragged the cab past the lodge-house and took us up to the door of Captain Bromley’s pretty house. Here Esther was mistress. Her command over the servants was absolute.

‘Don’t mention Mrs. Norman’s name,’ I whispered, as she called to one of the maids.

She cast a glance at me, as much as to say, ‘I’m not such a fool as you take me to be,’ and proceeded to give her orders.

Mrs. Norman had slept by fits and starts through the long journey—never for more than a few minutes, without a change of position. When we took her from the cab she was helplessly confused, and apparently unconscious of her surroundings.

A fire was speedily lit in one of the bedrooms, and thither Mrs. Norman was carried. I went downstairs. When Esther had put Mrs. Norman to bed, she came down to me.

'Now, Mr. Peters,' she said, assuming a very distant and cold demeanour, 'you will be good enough to explain things. You have tried to keep Mrs. Norman in your own hands, and take an unfair advantage of my confidence in you.'

'Nothing of the sort,' I replied. 'If I had wanted to do that, why should I come to you at the last moment, when I am about to be repaid for all I have undergone in saving Mrs. Norman? Why did I not seek the assistance of Mr. Grote, who actually told me to apply to him if I needed help? I know I have not answered your letters, nor communicated with you, but you shall have ample reason for all that when we have time to talk about such trifles. We have matters of importance to think about. It is not sufficient to have brought Mrs. Norman here; we must keep her. If we do that we may name our own reward for the service; if we don't—if we lose her—then we may expect to get piper's pay, and nothing but it. Dr. Norman is after his wife; if he finds her here, neither you nor I, with all your servants, and Mr. Grote, the lawyer, at the back of 'em, can keep her out of his hands. He's on our track, and in twenty-four hours he'll be knocking at the door, and asking for his wife.'

This brought Esther to her senses. I saw that she was at a loss for any plan to resist Dr. Norman. Women have no inventive power. But they won't acknowledge their deficiency.

'What do you propose to do, Mr. Peters?' she asked, in a milder tone, yet with a certain dignity which seemed to imply that if she only chose she could manage the whole concern for herself.

'Captain Bromley has taken his wife abroad with him, of course?' I said.

'Yes.'

'Where were they married?'

'At Wimbledon.'

'Directly after the marriage they went abroad?'

'A short time after.'

'Where are Mrs. Bromley's friends—the old philosopher and the housekeeper?'

'Mr. Schlobach is in Germany; Miss Trevor returned to Faulcondale.'

'Are any of the servants here who were with old Mrs. Bromley, and knew Mrs. Valentine?'

'The cook; that is the only one. I can trust her; she wants me to engage her husband as lodge-keeper.'

'The cook is the stout party who came out to the cab?'

'Yes.'

'Then we must trust her, as she has seen Mrs. Norman.'

'I don't quite follow you.'

'Wait a moment. Do you think anyone else here—anyone in the neighbourhood—knows Mrs. Valentine Bromley?'

'No, no one, unless it is the house-agent at Chislehurst who showed them the house.'

'There's not much to fear from him. Now, when do you expect Mrs. Bromley to come back?'

'In a week—about the 27th or 28th. Captain Bromley will let me know a day or two before, that I may have the house ready.'

'That's exactly what we want!' said I joyfully. 'There's no reason that I can see why we should not put my scheme in operation. And we must do it at once, for Mrs. Norman must be attended by a doctor without delay. Now, Miss Norton, go and see the cook before she has time to talk to the servants, and let her know that if she wants to keep her place, and obtain the situation of lodge-keeper for her husband, she must keep our secret, and carry out the instructions she receives from you to the letter.'

'We can rely upon her. What instructions am I to give?'

'In the first place, she must go downstairs and let all the servants know that the sick lady upstairs is their mistress—Mrs. Valentine Bromley.'

'Mrs. Valentine Bromley?'

'Yes. By that means we can defy Dr. Norman. We must have it known all round that this Mrs. Valentine Bromley has returned. Let Dr. Norman inquire as he may, he will learn nothing but that. Do what he will, he can't get at her and take her away. But without this plan, nothing can prevent him from getting an order from the magistrate for the restoration of his wife. If she goes out of our hands, our prospects are ruined.'

‘I understand. But when the real Mrs. Valentine comes home——’

‘Leave that to me. You say Captain Bromley will give you warning of his return? That will enable us to arrange matters with him. Run upstairs at once, and come down again as soon as you have had your talk with the cook.’

While she was gone, I turned over in my mind what was to be done about a doctor. My experience at Ramsay warned me to have nothing to do with a local doctor; from him Dr. Norman might learn particulars regarding the patient which would identify Mrs. Norman and blow up my stratagem.

Before I had settled who was to be called in, Esther Norton came down.

‘I have made the cook understand what is necessary, and she is only too glad to help us,’ said she. ‘The servants are already learning from her that the sick lady is Mrs. Valentine Bromley. We ought to send for the doctor immediately. Mrs. Norman is quite delirious.’

I told her my difficulty about a doctor. She was able to help me.

Before taking service with Mrs. Bromley at Wimbledon, Esther had been housemaid to Dr. McCulloch, in Saville Row. She proposed that we should telegraph for him. This was a good idea, and I undertook to go to the post-office myself and wire him. I told Esther in the mean time to place someone in the lodge-house, with instructions to tell any visitors that Mrs. Valentine Bromley was too ill to receive visits, and to let no one pass on any account.

I went to the post-office, and sent a telegram, with pre-paid reply, to Dr. McCulloch, asking him to come at once, and to state at what time a carriage should be at Chislehurst Station to meet him; and, having nothing of immediate importance to take me back to Woldhurst, I stayed at the office for his answer. It came in about two hours. Dr. McCulloch would be at Chislehurst Station at 1.15.

I went to Woldhurst. A man was already installed in the lodge; he had seen me arrive with the cab, and let me pass. In reply to my question, he said that no one had called. Esther was upstairs with Mrs. Norman. The poor lady was completely unconscious of me. There was no danger in talking before her.

‘Dr. McCulloch will ask about Mrs. Bromley—what story shall we make up for him?’ I asked.

‘We need not trouble ourselves about that,’ said she. ‘Servants are not supposed to know anything about the affairs of their employers. It will be quite sufficient to say that Mrs. Valentine came home in this alarming condition, and that I thought it advisable to send for him upon my own responsibility in the absence of Captain Bromley. He won’t inquire into particulars. He will be satisfied by the look of the house that his fees are all right. That’s all he looks at. Oh! these doctors have more mysterious cases than this to deal with, I assure you. The separation of a newly-married husband and wife—the illness of the wife—these are things common enough in the upper circles. I have not lived ten months in a doctor’s family without learning something about these affairs.’

I was very well content with this arrangement, for I did not want to tell unnecessary lies. They are dangerous tools to work with, and as like as not to cut the operator’s fingers for all his care in using them.

A carriage was sent to fetch the doctor, and he arrived in due time, I keeping out of sight, as it seemed to me advisable. He prescribed for Mrs. Norman, was perfectly satisfied with the brief statement of Esther Norton, and left, promising to send a qualified nurse, and to call at the same time the following day.

For three days Mrs. Norman was delirious, and in extreme danger of losing her life. Then her complaint took a favourable turn, and on the fourth day the doctor pronounced that she had passed the crisis, and, unless she suffered a relapse, would recover.

Her first words on recovering her senses were to ask for me. Esther took me to her bedside, and I told her what had happened since we left Barrow. I assured her she was now out of danger from her husband, and that in a few days Captain Bromley would come to protect her.

But this announcement, instead of comforting her, revived her old dread. Burying her thin face in the pillow, she cried :

‘It is all in vain, all in vain! I cannot escape. Valentine does not care for me. He is married; why should he

keep his wife out of the house for me? He will want to get me away: he will give me up to my husband.'

'No, ma'am,' I said, 'he will do no such thing. He will keep you here as his wife until he has obtained legal means for separating you from Dr. Norman.'

'That is folly; it cannot be. Do you think his wife will tolerate that? Not if she loves him. I am not an old woman; it is impossible.'

'Calm yourself, ma'am,' said I; 'the doctor warns us that excitement is to be dreaded. Your life depends upon calm.'

'My life! who wishes me to live? Not I—nor Valentine, nor his wife—not anybody in the world.'

I tried to assure her that all would be well, but she would not accept my assurance. When I begged her to be reasonable, she retorted:

'I am reasonable. I see it all only too clearly. I tell you Valentine cannot keep me in this house as his wife. It is preposterous. No wife would suffer that.'

She was so excited, that to avoid a relapse I took Esther aside, and told her that we must reveal our secret. This young woman had in the last few days become so convinced of my discretion and ability to conduct this matter to our mutual advantage, that she did not offer any objection, and at my suggestion left the room. Then I approached the bedside, where Mrs. Norman lay with her hands covering her face.

'Mrs. Norman,' I said, 'I am going to show you that Captain Bromley cannot give you up—that he must make any sacrifice, even the temporary sacrifice of his wife's happiness, to keep you here, and that he may do so without prejudice to his wife, even though you are a young and beautiful woman.'

'What do you tell me?' she asked, looking up in wonder.

'What I have to tell you is of a very delicate nature, but at a time like this one must set aside all considerations but that of your repose and tranquillity. You imagine that Captain Bromley has no interest in you because he is not related to you by any tie of kindred. But that is not the fact. He is your brother.'

'My brother!'

'Your brother. His mother was your mother, though your father was not his.'

‘Is this possible?’

‘Yes; Mr. Valentine will not deny it when you ask him, though he would never have told you voluntarily. His mother wished to conceal her own shame, and to spare you the pain of her own dishonour. She made her son promise secrecy, but she told him all, that he might not forsake you in your troubles. You know him well enough to be convinced that he will not forsake you.’

‘My brother, my brother!’ she said, in a tone of bewilderment, and it was a long time before she quite realized the fact. Then for awhile there seemed to be a conflict of shame and love in her breast; but love prevailed, and a smile of happiness lit up her face as she repeated, in a soft tone, ‘My brother!’

‘Yes, I am sure that now he will not let me be taken away,’ she said later on. ‘He will keep me here if it is necessary. But his wife! She cannot come here—the servants would betray me. She could not conceal the real position from them if she would. And she must be jealous of me; for Valentine cannot tell her that I am his sister, nor can I, for his mother’s sake.’

This, indeed, was a reasonable supposition, and one I had not foreseen.

‘He cannot tell her that,’ she continued, ‘and how is he to prevent unhappiness unless he does?’

I reflected a few minutes, and then I said:

‘He will keep his wife out of the way until you are in safety, and trust to his wife’s confidence in his love.’

‘You do not understand our jealous dispositions,’ she answered. ‘No matter how she loves him, she cannot, being separated from him, reconcile herself to his being here with me. He may appeal to her pity, tell her of my position, but it will not satisfy her; she will only see that I am a young woman, and a possible rival. I am sure Valentine will not betray his mother’s secret.’

‘Then,’ said I, ‘he will take the only other course that is possible. He will keep all the facts secret from her during the few weeks that you must still be confined to this house. A few weeks! It may only be a few days before you are able to leave England. Out of the country, Dr. Norman cannot persecute you.’

‘If it were only for a little time he might keep his wife in ignorance.’

‘To be sure he might, ma’am,’ said I; ‘so you see it only depends upon your keeping a calm and hopeful spirit to get well, and put an end to the whole difficulty.’

This was about all that passed between us. It must be understood that neither she nor I used exactly the same words I have written, but these are the heads of our conversation, and as near the form they took as I can at present recall to mind.

CHAPTER XXXIV

THE NARRATIVE OF THOMAS CRAIK CONTINUED.

I GAVE Esther Norton a faithful account of what had passed between Mrs. Norman and me—for I felt sure she had been listening at the door during our conversation—and that increased her confidence in me, and made her more amiable than ever.

I had kept indoors since my arrival at Woldhurst, only going out for a little exercise after dark. The confinement and inactivity after so much movement and excitement wearied me excessively. It was not to be of long duration.

The same evening as the foregoing talk had taken place, I went down the avenue about eight o’clock, and calling in at the lodge, asked the newly-installed lodge-keeper if anyone had called during the day.

‘No, sir,’ said he respectfully; ‘nobody but the tradespeople.’

‘Are you quite sure of that?’ I asked sharply, detecting a little hesitation in his reply—‘are you certain no one at all has called?’

The rascal looked at me uneasily, and then, fearing that a trap had been laid for him, thought it best to tell the truth.

‘Wait a bit, sir,’ said he; ‘now I come to think of it, a gentleman did call to ask if Captain Bromley was at home, and I told him that Captain Bromley was not come back yet.’

‘And what did you tell him about Mrs. Bromley?’

‘Well, when he asked about her, I told him that she had come home ill. I hope I didn’t do wrong, sir?’

Without replying to that, I cross-questioned him as to the appearance of the gentleman, and he, still, I believe, under the impression that I knew all, and was making these inquiries to test his reliability, answered me with tolerable straightforwardness.

From his description of the gentleman I had not the slightest doubt that it was Dr. Norman.

‘What else did he ask?’ said I.

‘Nothing else, upon my oath, sir,’ he answered.

‘Nothing about me?’

‘Not a syllable.’

I believed the fellow. I told Esther Norton how he had prevaricated in the first instance; but she was of opinion that he did that because he feared he had overstepped the mark in speaking of Mrs. Bromley.

To have discharged the man on the bare supposition of his being unfaithful to us would have made him a dangerous enemy.

Esther promised to caution his wife, the cook, and again declared her entire belief in their trustworthiness.

I felt more uneasy than ever the next day, hanging about the kitchen with the knowledge that Dr. Norman might be bribing the fellow down at the lodge to reveal our secret.

While we were at lunch, the lodge-keeper’s daughter came up to say that her father wished to see me. I went down at once, taking a path from which I could not be seen from the road.

‘He has been here again asking after Mrs. Bromley’s health, sir,’ said the lodge-keeper. ‘I thought it right to let you know at once.’

‘Who has been?’ I asked.

‘The gentleman who called yesterday,’ he responded.

‘He left his card; there it is, sir.’

I took the card, and read:

*Dr. Norman Norman,
58, Villiers Street, Strand.*

This was a bold stroke, characteristic of the doctor.

It increased my feeling of insecurity by the very fact that we could not then see what purpose was served by this open avowal of his visit.

We were fighting in the dark, and every movement of the

enemy inspired us with dread of an attack which we were unprepared to meet.

Esther realized as fully as I did that our reward depended upon keeping Mrs. Norman out of her husband's hands until the arrival of Captain Bromley at Woldhurst.

The necessity of achieving this suggested a course to me which I think was quite as bold as that taken by Dr. Norman. I determined to go to Villiers Street and see him.

The object I had in view was part of my scheme for getting the stolen letter, and as I did not intend that Esther Norton should participate in the profits of that undertaking, I said nothing to her of my intention to have an interview with Dr. Norman.

Pretending that I was going to get, if possible, Captain Bromley's address from Mr. Grote, the solicitor, I bade her farewell that evening, and went to London by the last train.

The next morning I called at 58, Villiers Street. The servant who opened the door said that Dr. Norman was at home. I sent up the name of Peters, and was presently called upstairs to Dr. Norman's rooms on the first floor.

The breakfast things were on the table.

The doctor was seated before the fire in his dressing-gown, with a newspaper in his hand.

He was just the same in appearance as I had seen him day after day in his laboratory at the Moat. He was one of those men who seem never to alter.

'Well, Peters,' he said, in his customary tone of calm observation, 'what do you want here?'

I closed the door, and standing hat in hand before him, tried to be just as calm and self-possessed as he.

'Dr. Norman,' said I, 'I won't waste your time; you and I know each other.'

'I have a pretty clear knowledge of your character, at any rate,' he replied.

'And my motives as well, I dare say, sir. You know what I've been trying after since the day I entered your service.'

'You have been trying after one or two things, and, like most persons who overrate their ability, you have succeeded in getting nothing for your pains.'

'Yes, sir,' said I. 'As far as profit goes, that is a fact. You and I are about equal in that respect up to this point.'

'What do you say?' he asked, not overpleased by this retort.

'I say, sir, that we have both been playing the same game, and up to now neither of us is one penny the better off than when we began. What do you say to making it a draw, and dividing the pool?'

'You must not try to be clever if you wish me to understand what business has brought you here. Speak as if you were addressing your equal in intelligence.'

'Very well, sir, I'll be plain. You have a letter from Mr. Howard by which his daughter, now Mrs. Valentine Bromley, can obtain possession of a quarter of a million of money. If your wife had committed suicide, and you had married Miss Howard, that letter would make you a rich man. At present it only makes you a thief.' He looked at me viciously for a moment, and then, as if to show his indifference, he turned to a side table and took a sheet of paper and an envelope.

'Go on,' he said, opening a pencil-case, and beginning to write.

'The letter,' I went on, 'is as valueless as the envelope you put in Captain Bromley's bag. It's a dangerous possession from the moment I tell Captain Bromley that the Mr. Everleigh who disappeared on the day that letter was lost is the same person as Dr. Norman.'

'You think you can make him believe that?' he asked carelessly, whilst still writing.

'Yes, by the simple process of bringing you face to face with Captain Bromley and his wife.'

'You think to get money out of me by suppressing what you state as a fact,' he said, folding the written sheet.

'No; my purpose in coming here is not to take money out of your pocket, but to put money into it.'

He put the written sheet into the envelope, asking me how I proposed to do this.

'The lost letter is no good in your hands, as I have shown. It is worth a good deal in mine. I will buy it of you.'

'What are you prepared to give?' he asked, wetting the flap of the envelope.

'Five thousand pounds.'

'Hum! that is just half of ten thousand, is it not?' he asked with the utmost complacency, rising and touching a bell. I did not feel so confident now. Evidently he knew the sum Mr. Schlobach was prepared to give. His coolness puzzled me.

'Go on—if you have anything more to say,' he said, seating himself.

'That is the offer I make,' said I.

He did not reply, but addressed the envelope. As he finished the door opened, and the servant came in.

'Take this to the nearest police-station, Mary,' said Dr. Norman, giving her the letter.

She looked astonished. He repeated the instruction, and as she closed the door he turned to me.

'Do you know that a warrant is issued for your arrest on the charge of murdering Mrs. Norman, by setting fire to Beauchamp Moat?' he asked.

That took my breath away

'I have just written to the police-office, informing them that you are here. If you have sense enough to see your danger, you will save yourself without delay. In any case, you will be good enough to relieve me of your objectionable company. I have told you once before that you are a blundering idiot. I have no sympathy with blundering idiots. Leave the room.'

I withdrew, and with the greater alacrity as I heard the street door slam, and knew that the girl had gone to the police-station. And never before had I felt so insignificant, or so fully recognised the genius of Dr. Norman. He was a real master of strategy. All that I had done was as nothing compared with his achievement. My successes were the result of fortunate accidents, his the outcome of profound discretion, forethought, and subtle ability to fit the means to his end.

I was forced to admire him. 'He will succeed,' I said to myself, with conviction. 'There is no staying a genius like that in his course. I have no chance. If his object is to get Mrs. Norman into his hands again, he will get her; and if he intends to get that quarter of a million besides, he will get it, though he has to kill his wife and Captain Valentine Bromley as well to obtain his end.'

Would he kill his wife and Captain Bromley in order to

get at the money which Mrs. Valentine Bromley alone could realize? That was a question. If it could be done without endangering his own life, I had no doubt he would do it. These reflections came to me later in the day. For some time after quitting the house in Villiers Street, my mind was solely occupied with a regard for my own safety.

I saw perfectly well that Dr. Norman knew I had been staying at Woldhurst, and that if I returned there to oppose his plans he could have me haled off at any moment. By betraying Mrs. Norman, I could clear myself of the charge of murder; but it would be less easy to show that I had no hand in burning down the house.

In all cases it would ruin me to be caught. So I resolved to keep away from Chislehurst. Yet, had I been as sagacious then as I have been since the event, I should have seen that Woldhurst was the safest refuge I could take. For it is clear (now) that had not Dr. Norman wished me to escape, he would not have sent openly for the police, and that his main object was to get me away from Woldhurst.

I caught a bus that was passing the top of Villiers Street, and was taken up Chancery Lane, through Holborn, and into Clerkenwell. There I got out, feeling that in that densely populated district I was pretty safe from pursuit. I sent a message to Esther Norton, telling her that Mrs. Norman was menaced with a new danger, and that the precautions for her safety must be doubled. 'I must stop here for a time; I leave Mrs. N. in your hands with confidence,' I added.

I received an answer later in the day at the coffee-house where I told her to address me.

'I will answer for Mrs. N.'s safety while I am here,' she said, 'but you had better come here to-morrow morning. I have received a telegram from Captain Bromley, and shall go to Dover to meet him to-morrow afternoon.'

I was heartily glad to hear of Captain Bromley's speedy return; but I was at my wits' end to know what to do about going to Woldhurst. I at length decided that Mrs. Norman must take her chance, for I was too fearful of apprehension by the police to venture there. I sent another message to Esther, telling her by all means to meet Captain Bromley, and adding that if she did not see me before starting, she might be certain I was taking better means for Mrs. N.'s

protection. This was as near the truth as I thought it advisable to go. I did not quit Clerkenwell.

I received many messages subsequently from Esther, and sent replies. On the 29th of October I learnt that Esther had met Captain Bromley at Dover the preceding night, that he had determined to carry out the plans we had laid, and that he had promised ample reward for our services in Mrs. Norman's behalf. This was cheering and satisfactory. I had achieved something, blundering idiot or not.

She assured me later that there was no danger, that Dr. Norman had not again called, that the lodge-keeper had seen nothing of him, and that Mrs. Norman's health was improving so rapidly that in a short time she would be able to leave England. I determined to keep out of the way until she had left England, for being sure of reward there was nothing to gain, but a good deal to lose, by venturing near Woldhurst.

CHAPTER XXXV.

FROM THE NARRATIVE OF DOROTHEA BROMLEY.

I do not think I lost consciousness entirely. I remember plunging in the sea, the whirl in my ears as the water closed over my head, my being lifted into a boat in which there were two roughly clad, weather-beaten men, and carried thence up steps and across a road into a hotel; but these incidents are vague in my memory, as if they had occurred long, long ago. My senses were numbed; I had no power to help myself, no will either to accept or refuse the help of others. The mistress of the hotel and her servant, to whom she spoke in Flemish, undressed me and put me to bed. I was glad of the warmth, and, like a dazed child, I drew the clothes up over my ears, saying to myself, 'What have I done? What have I done?' And I fell asleep because I was too stupefied to realize what it was I had done.

When I awoke I found the two women sitting at the table working by the light of a lamp. The servant was knitting; the mistress was sewing; beyond them was a stove shaped like a vase, and red hot. The heat was too much; I pushed away the eider-down. As I moved the women rose: the servant went to the stove; the mistress

came to me and asked me in French how I found myself. But although I understood her, I was still too perplexed to answer. Then the maid came with a plate of soup and a serviette; I took some, and it gave me strength and cleared my senses a little.

I questioned the woman, and found that it was nearly nine o'clock, and I had slept for six hours. She told me the gentleman had been to the door many times and asked about me, and she inquired if I would like to see him. I said no; I wanted to sleep again, that was all. And refusing to eat any of the things she had prepared for me, I lay down and fell asleep once more. Some people have asked how I could sleep at such a time; it is a mystery to me. I think it must have been because forgetfulness was so sweet, and my strength exhausted. When I again woke, the maid only was in the room, and she had fallen asleep in her chair with her knitting in her lap.

I sat up, feeling now quite wide awake. It was half-past twelve by the timepiece on the mantel. My dried clothes were by the bedside. I noticed that my dress was no longer fresh, and that the trimmings were cockled by the wet. 'It is spoilt,' I said to myself with regret, remembering that it was the dress Valentine loved. Then I recollected that he was dead, and everything came back to my mind, and I saw more clearly all that had happened than I had yet seen it. There was no sleep for me after that, and no forgetfulness. Oh, those long, long hours of shame and indignation, of savage exultation and cowering remorse, of passionate hate and passionate love! I could not rest in bed. I got up and dressed; then I paced the room while the heavy maid breathed heavily in her sleep, and the busy timepiece went 'tick-tack, tick-tack,' in mockery as it seemed. I will not dwell on my sufferings. It is not for me to appeal for pity: I had done wrong, and that was my punishment. It was no more than I deserved, though, Heaven knows, I would not inflict such retribution on worse offenders.

The girl awoke before it was light, spoke to me in Flemish, fetched fuel, and lit the fire in the stove. Then the proprietress of the hotel came and said something to me, and I replied mechanically, I know not what. Breakfast was brought, and I ate and drank a little. Soon afterwards, I being alone in the room, there was a knock at the door; I

said 'Come in,' and Mr. Everleigh walked in briskly with a smile on his face.

'I am glad to see you looking so much better,' he said, holding out his hand.

I drew back my hand and shrank away, fearing he would touch me. He raised his eyebrows with a look of pained surprise. Then dropping his hand by his side, he bowed his head as if in humiliation. It mattered not to me whether he was pained or not. I had no pity in my heart.

'When shall you be ready to go?' he asked, after a minute's pause and in an altered tone.

'Go!' I exclaimed. 'Where?'

'To America; a vessel leaves this afternoon. We must be at Antwerp before two o'clock; we ought to start at once. There is the outfit to purchase.'

'I have no intention of going to America,' I said.

'Pardon me, I thought by your reply to my question that you had not decided where to go, and left your safety in my hands. It seemed to me that in going to America we should be safe from pursuit. Of course I shall be happy to accept any proposal you may make.'

'I have nothing to propose. If you think it advisable to go to America, go.'

He smiled at me pityingly.

'What plans have you made for the future?' he asked.

'None,' I replied. 'I have thought only of the past.'

'Where shall you go when you leave here?'

'I do not know that I shall leave here.'

'What do you think will become of you if you stay?'

'I do not care what becomes of me. It does not matter to anyone.'

'You mistake—it is a matter of life or death to me.'

'I do not ask you to stay with me. I wish you to go. Leave me.'

'Is that the part of a brother?'

'A brother!'

'I have a brother's feeling for you, though you may not have a sister's consideration for me. Who but a brother would, at the risk of his life, have avenged your dishonour? Have I no claim upon your generosity?'

'What do you expect of me?'

'Credit for the common feeling of a man.'

I could only think of him as a murderer. It seemed to me impossible that he who had shot my husband should have any feeling. I was silent.

'Put yourself in my place,' he said; 'think that you are a man, and placed in my position.'

'I am trying to do so,' I answered; 'I am trying to justify you—and I cannot succeed. Had I been a man, called upon by a girl wrought to madness by jealousy to take the life of the one she loved, I would have waited until her reason returned before I lifted my hand.'

'Not if you had watched that villain as I have watched him, betraying your faith and love, deliberately preparing to abandon you, and making light of your ruin! You would have killed that heartless scoundrel. You would have done as I have done, and as I would do again had that bullet missed his heart.'

He spoke with fury in his voice and in his look. His anger was not yet appeased. Yet he imparted no vengeful feelings to me. That was strange to me even then, recollecting the fury that possessed me when I only suspected the wrong done to me.

'Valentine is dead,' I said to myself, and my passion was dead also.

'But that is not what I meant,' Mr. Everleigh pursued. 'It is my present position I ask you to consider. Would you in my place run away? Do you think I am such a coward, such a craven wretch, as to think only of my own safety? Would anyone with a spark of manly feeling consent to leave you here, friendless, penniless, helpless, distracted, and desperate? Indeed you wrong me!'

He paused, but I had no response to make.

'I have Bromley's death to answer for,' he continued, 'and I do not shrink from my responsibility. But what I dare not face is the possibility of having yours on my conscience.'

'You fear that I shall again attempt to destroy myself?' I said.

'I wish you would tell me that it is a groundless fear.'

'It is a groundless fear. I could not bear my punishment yesterday; I wish to bear it now.'

'You give me your promise?'

'It is given. And now that you see I have no need of

protection, leave me. I want to bear what I have to bear by myself—alone.'

He stood before me in silence for a moment, looking at me with an expression that I could not understand.

'And you think we are to part thus,' he said bitterly, 'like two strangers who have been forced to take a common shelter during a storm. You dismiss me with less ceremony than if I had stooped to pick up your handkerchief.'

'What do you want?' I asked, wondering not less what he could want than what I had to give.

'Nothing, but the privilege of a brother to watch over you—the privilege of a friend, of a mere acquaintance, to speak to you from time to time.'

'I cannot accept your help, I cannot think of you as a friend. If you could know how I feel towards you, you would spare me the pain of saying this.'

'I know exactly how you feel. Thank heaven, that feeling will wear off, and give place to more healthy, less morbid sentiments.'

I shook my head, and prayed within myself that I might die before I ceased to feel repugnance towards this man—for not to feel repugnance meant to be callous to my own shame, and remorseless for the sin I had done.

He walked up the room in deep thought, and, returning, raised his head and looked at me with great earnestness. Suddenly stopping, he cried decisively:

'No, I cannot leave you—I dare not!'

'Do you think I shall break my word?' I asked.

'You will not break your word, I am certain of that. You will not again attempt self-destruction. But that is not the only danger; and will you avoid danger, that is the question?'

'I do not understand you.'

'In a few hours the police will probably present themselves here and arrest you for the murder of Valentine Bromley.'

'What then?' I asked, and he could see from my face that the risk had no terror for me.

'Will you tell them that you are innocent?'

'How can I tell them that without lying? I am not innocent. But for me he would be living now.'

'If they ask you whether you fired the bullet that went through his heart?'

‘I will answer “no”!’ I cried eagerly.

‘If they will not believe you, if there is no escape except by denouncing me as the murderer, will you denounce me?’

‘No,’ I answered, after some reflection. ‘Nothing would induce me to say that you shot Valentine.’

‘In that case,’ said Mr. Everleigh, ‘I cannot leave you here.’

He paused, but seeing that I was perplexed to know his reason, he continued :

‘Because only by denouncing me can you possibly escape being punished for the act I committed.’

Just then the hotel proprietress entered with a book and an inkstand.

‘What is this?’ asked Mr. Everleigh, looking at the book she had laid on the table.

She explained to him that it was a form which had to be filled up for the information of the police.

He glanced at me significantly and wrote in the required particulars relating to himself, then he put the pen in my hand.

The woman had turned to the stove, and was putting fuel into it.

‘You see,’ said Mr. Everleigh, speaking in a low tone not to be heard by the woman above the noise that she made with the coals, ‘you see that there is already danger for you and me. Fill in the form.’

It was divided into columns, with printed instructions at the head of each. In the first my name was required, in the second my age, then my state, my place of residence, and my destination. What was I to write, having no name, no state, no home, no future resting-place?

‘I will write for you,’ said Mr. Everleigh, seeing my inability.

He wrote, ‘Dorothea Bromley, married,’ and then he stopped; the place relating to our destination was blank.

‘The moment has come for you to decide,’ he said; ‘what shall I write here—America?’

‘No, no,’ I answered quickly, for I sickened, not at the thought of going to America, that was unimportant to me, but at the prospect of being thrown into companionship with him during the voyage; ‘not that.’

‘Then it is useless to fill up this form; I may as well at

once give myself up to the police, declaring the crime of which I am guilty.'

I sought in my mind for an expedient by which I might avoid either course, by which I might take the burden of responsibility on my own shoulders, and free myself from the debt to him.

'At least you will give me a chance of escape,' he said impatiently; 'you will lead my pursuers to suppose that we have left Europe,' and without waiting for my assent, he wrote 'Antwerp' in the vacant space.

As he handed the form to the woman of the house, he asked about the trains to Antwerp.

The mail left the quay station at three o'clock in the afternoon, but an earlier one left the town station at nine; the omnibus would be ready to take us in ten minutes.

We left Ostend by the early train. There was an hour to wait at Brussels. Mr. Everleigh took me into the waiting room, bought some books and illustrated papers, and laid them on the seat beside me; then he left me, saying he would return in half an hour.

I dreaded him. I felt that his power was irresistible, that what he wished me to do I must do. My fate was linked to his by the act of vengeance he had committed at my bidding. But my soul recoiled from his. Vaguely I perceived that, low as I had fallen, there was still a lower depth to which he was leading me. I could not define the condition that inspired me with terror—it was like standing at the edge of an abyss impenetrable to the eye. I merely knew that it was an abyss, and that he was urging me onward. And with my dread of that grew an intense desire to free myself from his hands, to be at liberty to follow the guidance of my own spirit wherever it led.

I knew he meant that I should leave Europe, and with him, and that if I did not escape now, all hope of escaping afterwards was gone. Against my will he had brought me to this point, against my will he would make me go further. How could I cut my cords and escape this terrible bondage?

There was a continuous incoming and outgoing of people. I was unnoticed in the dark corner where I sat. If I could only pass out with the crowd and escape into the city! I did not know Brussels, but I pictured it like London, and I thought how a little person like myself might escape in such

a thoroughfare as the Strand and defy recapture. Was it not possible so to escape here? And if it were possible, why should I not do so? If I was safe here from him, I was safe from other pursuers, and he was no longer constrained by consideration of my safety to endanger his. What did I owe him? Nothing that I could repay. I was a worthless bankrupt. These thoughts passed quickly through my mind in less time than I have taken to write them. I do not pretend that they were right or logical, or generous or just, but they seemed to justify me in escaping if I could, and that was everything.

Mechanically I rose from my seat and went to the door through which he had passed. It opened as a lady with her children came into the room, and beyond them I saw Mr. Everleigh standing in the adjoining hall before a large bill on which there was a picture of a steamship. I could not pass that way without being seen by him. I went back to my corner and sat down again, but not in despair. The thought of escape had brought back a glimmer of hope. A feverish anxiety stimulated my imagination and excited my cunning.

I observed that from time to time a porter unlocked the door opening upon the platform and called out the names of stations, and then the people who had been accumulating trooped out through the doorway. There, I saw, was my only chance. If I got on to the platform I should at least advance a step towards freedom. I felt my heart beat once more as I waited.

Presently the porter opened the door and called out as before, and the people got up from their seats and pressed towards the door. I stopped until most had passed through, and then, with a last glance of fear towards the salle in which Mr. Everleigh was waiting, I fell in with the last of the passengers and passed on to the platform.

I kept amongst the crowd to avoid notice, and went towards the train standing by the platform, until at some little distance in advance I saw a projecting notice-board which indicated the way out. The next moment I was in the street and facing a row of voitures.

The drivers flocked towards me. I stepped into the nearest. The driver shut the door and waited for me to give a direction.

I was at a loss what direction to give him, knowing nothing about the City

‘Grand Hotel, Victoria Hotel, Belge Hotel,’ said the driver, doing his best to speak in my language, as it seemed that I could not speak in his.

‘Bristol Hotel—English ’ouse—very good—all right?’

‘Yes, yes ; Bristol Hotel,’ I said quickly, terrified lest Mr. Everleigh should discover my absence from the waiting-room, and prevent my escape.

But I got safely to the Bristol Hotel.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE NARRATIVE OF DOROTHEA BROMLEY CONTINUED.

IT was a large hotel in an open thoroughfare. I did not think I should be safe there. I might have to sign a police report like that at Ostend, which would betray me. Besides, I was beginning to awake to the practical difficulties of my situation ; I had no money save a few shillings, and those the driver took from me. How was I to live in a hotel without clothes or money?

I turned from the big street into a narrow turning, where I was less open to observation, and there, as I walked along, I set myself to answer the question, ‘How am I to live?’—a question hard enough to answer by one who knew nothing about money, who had been from the earliest time cared for, and who had never done anything that could be called work.

I must get money, but how? I was willing to work, eager to work—but what could I do? I could not even undertake to do the work of an ordinary servant. Soon it would grow dark, soon I should feel weak for want of food.

In this little street there was a dingy restaurant, where I might dine safely, I thought ; and just at the corner, where it opened upon the Town Hall Square, a board hung outside a milliner’s announcing that there was a furnished lodging in the fourth story to let. That might do ; but first of all I must get money. It was strange to find money so important, after the utter indifference with which I had treated

the possession of it hitherto. Now it was absolutely indispensable—it was necessary to my freedom, to existence itself. Imagine the strangeness of these things to me!

I had skirted one side of the square and entered a street full of bright shops, and was still wondering where I was to get money for food and shelter, when I saw in a jeweller's shop-window a notice that diamonds were bought there. Then I thought of the miniature portrait of my mother, which I had worn attached to a piece of velvet round my throat ever since Mr. Schlobach gave it to me. It was set round with diamonds. I peeped through the glass door. No one was in the shop but a venerable-looking old gentleman with a white beard. But I passed the shop again and again—three or four times—before I could find courage to go in, and then it was with a feeling of desperation.

I told him I wanted some money, and took off the miniature and put it in his hand.

He took it to the light and examined it closely with a glass stuck under his eyebrow; then, taking out the glass, he looked at me almost as carefully, and asked me questions about the portrait, which I answered. He was very polite, but seemed puzzled to know how it came about that I should want money.

'You want to sell this locket, mademoiselle?' he asked, at length.

'Yes,' I replied; and then, pained to think of losing my mother's portrait, I added, 'but if you would put it by for a certain time until I can buy it back again I should be very grateful.'

'And how long do you think it will be before you can repurchase it?' he asked, smiling.

That was a question quite beyond my power of calculation, but I thought that perhaps in a few weeks I should be earning money, and I told him so.

'Then how much do you want for it?' he asked.

I said I should be glad to get what it was worth.

'Well, suppose I give you two hundred and fifty francs, mademoiselle?' said he.

I replied that I should be quite content with that; whereupon he put the portrait in a drawer, wrote out a receipt, and gave it to me to sign.

He had asked me if I were married, and with some hesi-

tation and shame I had said 'No'; so now it was less trouble to sign my maiden name than if I had not been so prepared for that humiliation.

'Dorothea Howard,' he said, reading my signature; 'very good,'—then he took three notes from his desk and gave them to me.

I went back to the dingy little restaurant in the narrow street and dined, for I felt faint and weak, and after that I went to the milliner's shop where the lodging was to let.

Madame Bichon, the milliner, led me up the crooked stairs—it was an old, old house—and showed me the rooms. They were quite at the top of the house; one room looked on to the square and faced the beautiful Town Hall; the people below looked no bigger than mice. Madame Bichon said it was very gay; it did not seem so to me, for my spirits were very low. But there was plenty of light; and the furniture, though scanty, seemed very clean and neat. Adjoining this room was another much smaller, with cooking utensils, plates and dishes, and that sort of thing.

'This is your kitchen, and here you can do your cooking; there is everything that is necessary.'

I was to be my own servant now. I had not thought of that.

'And then,' continued Madame Bichon, 'there is a good woman who comes in for the lodgers below who will fetch water and do the rough work if you do not choose to do it yourself, so that you can live like a grand lady for thirty francs a week.'

'That is the rent—thirty francs a week?' I said.

'Yes,' she said quickly; 'and not at all dear.'

I did not know whether it was dear or cheap, but I agreed to pay that sum, which is about twenty-four shillings in English money, and gave her a week's rent in advance as the condition of taking possession of the rooms at once.

How strange it seemed when Madame Bichon left me, and I sat alone in my room with the sounds from the square coming faintly to my ear, and everything so still around me, to cast my thoughts back on the turmoil and excitement through which I had passed. But I dared not let my mind dwell upon the past. It was all too horrible to look back upon.

I rose from my seat and busied myself with thinking of my present requirements. I must go out and buy a change

of clothes, and furnish my little kitchen with requisites. It was good to have something to occupy my thoughts, and even at that moment the romance of my situation seemed pleasant. Going in my kitchen, I looked round and made a mental list of the things I needed—fuel for the stoves, bread and butter and coffee and sugar, and things of that sort.

Before all this was settled, Madame Bichon returned to introduce the old woman who was to do rough work for me, and her I engaged at once to light my bedroom fire, fill my two scuttles with coal, and fetch water. When she was gone, Madame Bichon gave me some useful hints with respect to housekeeping, telling me where to buy my groceries and meat, and warning me against the knavery of shopkeepers and the dishonesty of people in general. To hear her, one would have thought that no one but she in Brussels was honest; yet I found, later on, that she had been the first to rob me—for the rooms I had taken had never before been let for more than nine francs a week.

It was dark before my old woman had done all that was to be done in my rooms, and then, with the blind drawn down, the fire burning well in my open stove, and my lamp lit on the table, the room looked cheerful and comfortable.

Now I felt I could go out with less danger of being seen by Mr. Everleigh, so I went downstairs, after locking my door, as Madame Bichon had advised me, and out into the street by the side entrance.

It took me some time to make all my purchases; some of the things I had sent home, others I myself took. But I did not care to stay indoors when all was done, for fear of thinking, so I went out again, wearing a veil I had bought. The streets were very bright and lively with people and girls of my own age, looking as if they might be going home from their work, and others as if they might be on their way to places of amusement; all looked cheerful and gay. I did not see any who seemed as if they had done harm in their lives, or bore the burden of a guilty conscience.

I would not go home until I was quite weary, and when I was in my rooms I set to work to unpack the things I had bought, and arrange them in their places neatly. I was grateful for something to do. But when there was nothing else to occupy me, I was very wretched, as I sat down to eat the supper I had prepared. The silence made me feel

so lonely. The sound of my knife on my plate, the movement of my chair and the like, all increased this feeling, because those sounds were solely the result of my own actions.

'There is no one like me in all the world,' I said to myself, as I lay in bed trying to fall asleep; 'no one so miserable and unhappy.' And then I could not help thinking of Faulcondale, though I kept my thoughts away from Valentine, of Miss Trevor, with her prim sweet face and gentle manners, and of my dear guardian smoking his huge pipe and bearing patiently with my caprices and wilfulness, and of my old pony Coquelicot refusing stubbornly to trot when one was in a hurry and impatiently starting off when one wished him to stand still in meeting a friend; and of the pleasant garden and the seat under the pear-tree, where Valentine had sat with me listening to the nightingale. Then I could bear it no longer—my heart that I thought was dead was yet quick to suffer at the memory of happiness, and after checking myself for some time, I at length hid my face under the clothes and burst into an agony of tears—not of remorse for my guilt, but of pity for myself.

It was a selfish indulgence to think of my own unhappiness and not of my guilt; the suffering was less cruel, for I did not recognise my shame.

I cried myself to sleep. It was light when I awoke. Someone was knocking at my door. I must have been dreaming of the old days, for I answered 'Yes,' in English, just as if I had been called by our little maid at Faulcondale, and I could not understand why the windows were not latticed. It was the old woman who had come to light my fires.

I made my own coffee, and very badly too—for I treated it like tea, not understanding the strainer, and the coffee came out floating on the top of some brownish-coloured water; and while I ate my breakfast, endeavoured to make some practical plans for the future. I must work, certainly. My only hope of forgetfulness was in that.

It struck me that perhaps Madame Bichon might help me in this matter. I had seen two girls working at the back of her shop; perhaps she might want a third. And as she had shown herself very obliging, and begged me over and over again to go to her if I needed anything, I determined I would appeal to her. So, as soon as I had finished

my meal and put away the things, I went down to her room and put the question to her without any circumlocution.

‘Well, what can you do?’ she asked, looking less amiable, I thought, than I had yet seen her look.

‘Nothing,’ I replied; ‘but I think I shall soon learn, for I must earn my living. I have only about two hundred francs in the world.’

Madame Bichon said a great deal about the bad state of trade, her expenses, the difficulty of teaching a young woman who had not been accustomed to work, and so on; but at length, out of consideration for my friendless condition, she consented to let me learn in her work-room if I would pay ten francs a week as a recompense for her trouble and the materials I should spoil before I could work to her advantage. I thanked her warmly for her kindness, and it was arranged that I should begin at once.

I took my place in the little work-room behind the shop with the other girls, and Madame Bichon gave me a thimble, needles and thread, and some materials, and she spent the whole morning in showing me how to cover a bonnet-shape.

I was very clumsy with my needle, pricking my fingers till the blood flowed, and doing no good at all. The two girls left off at times to look at me—then glanced at each other and looked down to conceal their laughter. My efforts must have been ludicrous indeed. But I kept steadily on, and did not much mind the whispering and covert ridicule of my fellow-workers—I had borne too much, had yet too much to bear, to be moved greatly by such a trifle as that.

My back ached, and my fingers ached, and my heart ached when the time came to leave off for the day, and there was nothing to show for my pains but a bent shape and some spoiled stuff.

It was a relief to be alone in my room and lie down before making my supper. In the evening I went out again as I had done the night before, and walked until I was tired out. Then I returned home and went to bed with leaden despondency. What hope was there for me? What was I striving for—to work in order that I might live and carry the burden of my shame and crime! Who could draw hope from that source?

The days succeeded each other without variety. Madame

Bichon gave me materials to work upon, and left me to work as best I could. A child could have done as well as I. It was absurd—my sitting there hour after hour spoiling materials and getting no further. If I had possessed a spark of merriment I should have laughed at my ludicrous failure fully as much as the girls did. But they took a malicious pleasure in my misfortunes—for they were jealous of a new hand, naturally. Every evening I went out, because it was impossible to sit indoors alone; my conscience would not let me rest—I could not read—I must keep on moving—moving. That was the reason I went out. The walk itself gave me no pleasure; how could it? What was there in shops to tempt my eye? Glitter and ornament were no more for me—all that was past. Friends meeting, lovers parting, mothers with their children, husbands with their wives—all these things seemed to mock at me and remind me of happiness gone, never to return.

I kept out of sight when I could, for it seemed to me that all could read my condition who looked at me. Indeed, I thought I must have my shame imprinted noticeably upon me, for people looked at me with curiosity, even stopping to look after me when I had hurried past. It must have been my bearing that betrayed me, for I constantly wore a veil in the street to hide my tragic face.

How old and worn I began to look! but my face had no repose of age. It was wild and frightened.

'Soon my hair will turn gray,' I said to myself. What did it matter? I no longer wanted to be beautiful.

After five or six days the two girls seemed kinder towards me. Perhaps they saw that I should never succeed as a workwoman, and that there was no likelihood of my taking work out of their hands. Perhaps their hearts were touched with my patient endeavours to overcome difficulty, my melancholy apathy, my friendlessness.

One day, when Madame Bichon had gone out to market, the girls opened a conversation with me, and the elder of the two, after beating about the bush some time, asked me how much a week I paid Madame.

I told them thirty francs for my rooms and ten for instructions—in all, forty francs a week.

At this they both put down their work and looked at me in blank amazement.

‘But if you can afford to pay that, why are you learning this trade?’ asked one.

‘That I may earn my living,’ I answered, ‘for in two or three weeks I shall have no money left.’

‘But do you know, my dear,’ said the younger, ‘that we don’t earn forty francs a week between us, and we have been at it ever since we could use a needle.’

It needed very little calculation to perceive that I was throwing away what little money I had, and that I was paying more for lodgings than a work-girl could afford. Indeed, they soon told me how I was being robbed by Madame, and advised me to get out of her hands before she had taken all my money, for that, they assured me, was her sole object in befriending me.

I resolved to seek a cheaper lodging, but I said nothing that day to Madame Bichon, lest I should betray the girls who had warned me against her.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THE NARRATIVE OF DOROTHEA BROMLEY CONTINUED.

THAT evening I discovered that I was tracked.

I was passing one of the galleries, when I caught sight for the first time of a young man walking at the same pace with myself on the opposite side of the street. I saw at a glance that he was English—his face, his gait, and the ulster he wore were unmistakably English.

I stopped for a minute before a shop; when I turned I saw that he also had stopped. I went on more rapidly than before; he quickened his pace. Just by the back of the Royal Theatre, where the street turned at an angle, he crossed. I heard his step gaining on me—he passed me looking sidelong, and a little further on he stopped before a shop. I passed, and again I heard his step behind me.

I turned into the narrow street leading up to the Town Hall; it was dark—there were few people there. I regretted at once that I had taken that turning, but there was no going back. And now once more I heard his quickening steps, and the next moment, coming to my side, he touched his hat without raising it, and said :

‘I beg your pardon, ma’am, but would you be good enough to tell me, and no offence I hope, if your name is Mrs. Valentine Bromley?’

It occurred to me at that instant to reply in French.

‘Est-ce que cela vous regard?’ I asked sharply.

‘Confound the lingo!’ he muttered, and then, touching his hat again, he apologized, and let me go on without further molestation.

But he was not satisfied; I turned in crossing the square, and saw him watching me from the pavement.

I took the turning leading to the Post-office, and believing that I had misled him, I returned by another street towards the square, and hurried up to my rooms.

I was but little excited by this incident; having nothing to hope for, I had scarcely anything to fear. I took off my bonnet and jacket, and went about preparing my supper; and when it was ready I ate and drank, and then put the things away.

This occupation was scarcely ended when I heard a footstep on the stairs and a knock at my door.

‘They have come for me,’ I thought; ‘it is so much nearer the end;’ and I went to the door.

To my surprise, the person who stood there was Mr. Everleigh.

‘You are surprised to see me,’ he said, bowing as he entered the room.

‘No,’ I replied; ‘you have set men to track me.’

He must have misunderstood me, for he showed no surprise as he replied:

‘There was no need for that. I have not lost sight of you for a day since you left the North station. You will permit me?’

Without waiting for my assent he seated himself, after placing a chair for me.

‘When I found you were gone,’ he continued, ‘I went on to Antwerp and took a couple of berths in your name and mine in the vessel that left for America that afternoon; and that, as I know, has completely thrown our pursuers off the scent. I came back at once to Brussels, knowing you must be here, and the next evening I saw you in the Rue Royal and followed you here. I have seen you every night since, but to-night I missed you. You have not been out, or you have come in earlier than usual.’

He spoke with a certain tenderness that implied that his surveillance had been that of an anxious friend and not of a persecutor.

‘I refrained from speaking to you—I purposely kept out of sight, for I know what you felt,’ he pursued. ‘But not seeing you to-night I felt very anxious—my anxiety has perhaps made me indiscreet.’

‘Why did you return?’ I asked, having nothing better to say.

‘Because I knew that sooner or later you would want a friend. And I am a friend, Miss Howard—an earnest, sincere, devoted friend, believe me. I have no wish to press you to any course against your inclination; but my regard for your safety was paramount. When your safety was secured I was anxious that you should go your own way as long as that was possible—that is still my anxious wish. If you tell me that I am still an object of repugnance to you, I will go away—not from this city, but from you: you shall not see me again, if I can help it and you desire it; but I cannot cease to watch over you. I am deeply responsible. I have thought continuously of the past, and see that I did wrong to act upon the sanction given by you in a moment of jealousy and madness. I did wrong to take vengeance into my hands even for your sake. It is a duty to see that no harm comes to you; it is my own solace to know that in the moment of need I shall be at your side to help you.’

He paused, looking at me with grave solicitude; and then with a voice that trembled slightly he added:

‘Surely it is not an unwelcome thought that one heart beats in sympathy with yours, that one friend lives for you?’

I could not say that the thought of him was repulsive to me. Why should I hate him? If he had committed a crime it was at my bidding. I was fully as guilty as he.

Reading what was in my mind, he continued in the same low, persuasive tone:

‘I know what you have suffered—the despondency, the desolation, the bitter want of all hope and consolation! What young creature could stand alone in the midst of gaiety and combat the misery of knowing that all mirth and joy has passed from her life?’

I turned my head away, for this picture of my hapless state touched my heart, and brought the tears up to my poor eyes.

'That burden is too heavy to bear,' he continued; 'one cannot live without hope.'

'Alas! one can,' I murmured.

'For a time; but only for a time. One's physical nature demands relief, and the struggle to obtain it overcomes moral opposition too often.'

'Do you mean that I shall grow callous to my shame?'

'That is what you have to fear. You are human; you are young. Hope alone can save the wretched from abandoning their souls to destruction. Hope must save you!'

'What hope is there for me?' I asked despairingly.

'The hope of doing good,' he said in a deep, earnest tone.

It was a shock to me, as it might be to a condemned prisoner were his dungeon walls to fall and reveal the bright heavens to his eyes.

'To lead an unselfish life,' he continued, 'a life of self-sacrifice—raising those who are fallen, encouraging those who, like ourselves, suffer, working that others may rest, watching that others may sleep, leading those who have gone astray into right paths—that is how we may obtain forgiveness of our own sins, and happiness!'

A cry of joy escaped me, for I was greatly moved with the thought of doing good, of lessening in others the woe I myself had felt.

Mr. Everleigh laid out his plans, telling me of a part of America where the people were living in a state of savagery; where men respected no law, human or divine; where the weak were abandoned; where women were treated as slaves, and little children with less tenderness than was shown to dogs. He said that missionaries dared not venture near the brutal colony.

'But what have we to fear?' he asked; 'we do not go to teach a creed, but to exercise humanity—to help those who are in need, without question of merit or desert. Will they bear you ill will because you clothe their children and heal their sick? What purpose will it serve them to ill-treat those who only seek to serve? They rob themselves if they take our lives.'

'And if they take our lives—what then?' I asked. 'I would rather die trying to do good, than live without hope!'

'I am sure of it,' he answered. 'I understand your nature, Miss Howard—understand it so well that I can foresee every

movement of your mind. I have reckoned upon your co-operation in this great work from the first. I have only waited to open my scheme to you until you were ready to receive it.'

He did not suffer my ardour to abate, and he, who usually was so cool, methodical, and circumspect, grew feverishly excited as he went ~~into~~ to the particulars of his scheme, showing me notes he had made in his pocket-book, and explaining the particular work he should undertake, and that which would be mine. It was all complete; nothing seemed to have escaped his attention.

'And now,' he said at length, 'I think I have given you a rough outline of all. The rest is detail. The first indispensable step you have doubtless foreseen.'

I considered a moment, and then I shook my head—for I really could not imagine what the step was he referred to.

'You must be my wife,' he said gravely. 'That is an inevitable necessity which you will see when you reflect upon what we propose to do.' He rose as he spoke. Taking his hat from the table, he added: 'I will say no more now. I will not ask you to decide at once. You are excited. You must have time for reflection before undertaking a work of such magnitude, before taking a course that is not to be retraced.'

He who read my thoughts and perceived my feelings so accurately must have seen the chill his words produced upon me, and the repugnance I felt to the idea of marriage—the inexplicable horror which the thought of personal contact with him inspired in me—for he did not offer me his hand, but with a low inclination of the head closed our strange interview and withdrew.

For a long, long while I sat revolving in my mind all that he had said, but chiefly the condition upon which all else seemed to depend—the condition that I should be his wife.

It was, as he had said, an inevitable necessity of the case. We could not work together in our present relations; we could not live amongst strangers under the false pretence of being brother and sister. We must be man and wife.

Considering I was as great a criminal as he, I could not tell why this proposal should be revolting to me. If I had indeed been Valentine's wife, I was now his widow, and free to marry again. Why then did the prospect of marriage

seem so loathsome to me? That it did was a fact—it was so horrible to my senses that it robbed the prospect of a higher life of its delights, and all the glamour my imagination had shed upon the undertaking disappeared.

Yet I felt that it must be—that the opening he had shown was the only issue from the sepulchre in which I stood. He had given me time for reflection, because, knowing the working of my mind, he foresaw that the result of reflection must be the acceptance of his proposal.

‘In a little while, maybe in a few days, I shall be his wife,’ I said to myself. My conviction was as strong as that of a fatalist who sees that, however he strives, the predestined end must come.

These reflections were interrupted by a knock at the door. A young man asked if my name was Howard, and then put a packet into my hand, saying it was from Monsieur Beau-lavon.

I did not recollect the name until I opened the packet. It contained the diamond-set miniature I had sold.

Then I remembered that the jeweller’s name was Beau-lavon.

There was no note with it; the messenger was gone, so I could ask him no question. But there was little need of that. Only one person could have redeemed the portrait and sent it to me, and that was Mr. Everleigh.

Coming just then, the incident increased the profound impression of Mr. Everleigh’s irresistible power over me. Nothing was impenetrable to him; I had no secret that he could not discover.

A feeling of awe was the only emotion I experienced. I was not grateful for the gift, though the portrait was dear to me, and its restoration showed delicate feeling and generosity on his part. If it had come from anyone else, I should have been deeply moved with gratitude. I asked myself why I could not look upon him as a friend, and I could not answer the question. I know now that it was because I still loved Valentine. Yes, though I would have banished him for ever from my thoughts, the love of Valentine still rested in my heart. That very night an incident occurred to prove it.

It was about eleven o’clock when I went to the window to draw down the blind. The room seemed close and hot; I

opened the window, and, tempted by the soft freshness of the air, leant upon the sill and looked down into the square. The people had not yet begun to stream home from the theatres; only now and then persons crossed the open space under the lamps. I followed them with my eyes without seeming to see them, for my thoughts were still dwelling upon Mr. Everleigh and his scheme.

I do not know how it came about, but suddenly I found myself looking with breathless interest at two figures below. One was a tall, big man, the other smaller, and wearing a long coat. They stood still for a minute while the smaller indicated with his hand the street leading down to the post-office. It was he who first attracted my attention, for I thought he resembled the man who spoke to me in the street—Dr. Norman's servant, Peters; but it was his companion upon whom my attention was concentrated after the first moment. At that distance, and viewed from that position, it was only possible to recognise well-known figures: features, especially at night and under the gas, were indistinguishable. Yet by some strange power that presence was made known to me, and I recognised that man down there. Had we been standing face to face and but a yard asunder, the impression could not have been more vivid. Not a doubt crossed my mind—I believed I was looking at my murdered husband!

While he stood there, I did not breathe—I could not move—every faculty seemed absorbed in contemplating that spectre; but when he turned away the spell was broken. I started from the window, and flew like a mad creature down the stairs and into the street. I had some vague idea of overtaking the two men. It was only when I reached the other side of the empty square that reason told me the vision I had seen was merely the creation of my disordered imagination.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

THE NARRATIVE OF DOROTHEA BROMLEY CONTINUED.

THE next morning I went down into the work-room as usual—albeit it seemed to me more useless than ever to struggle against my fate. The girls had shown me the impossibility

of earning a living there ; Mr. Everleigh had pointed out the path that I must take. What other course was open to me ?

At twelve o'clock I went upstairs to prepare my dinner. Madame Bichon met me on the stairs, and, reminding me that I had now been a week with her, begged that I would pay the sum due for the coming week, as she had a bill to pay and she was short of money. I promised to comply with her request at once.

I had been warned against leaving my door unlocked, and hitherto I had been careful to secure it. But this day I found it unfastened.

It is quite probable that I had left it so—my thoughts were so far away, my mind so distracted and weary with the perturbation of a sleepless night, that I might well have taken the key mechanically from the lock without turning it. Be that as it may, when I went to the little drawer where I had the night before put my newly-recovered miniature with the silver that remained of the two hundred and fifty francs, I discovered that all had been taken away. The drawer was quite empty.

This would have been a terrible blow had I been making progress as a workwoman, and looking forward with hope to a state of independence ; but in my present condition it affected me hardly at all. What is one blow more or less to a creature whose spirit has been broken by the hand of adversity ? I do not remember feeling regret over my loss. Certainly I felt no animosity towards the person who had taken it. I thought that the poor wretch whose necessities or propensities drove him to rob a poor girl like me was indeed to be pitied for having no feeling in his heart.

I think it was my apathy in this regard that put it into Madame Bichon's head that I was telling a lie. She could not understand how one losing all should make so little noise. Poor soul, she was the very reverse of me in that respect ; you would have thought it was she who had been robbed. I never saw a woman more excited over a trifle ; I dare say it irritated her because she was herself a loser, since I could no longer occupy her room or pay for instruction in millinery.

She became very angry, accusing me of designs which could have entered no head but her own, of lying and decep-

tion, and added many other injuries which I do not care to remember. But the upshot of all was that I must leave her house that day, and cease to spoil materials in her workroom which I could never pay for.

I returned to my room, packed my few effects in a little parcel, and then put on my bonnet.

While I was doing this, Eulalie, the elder of the two girls employed by Madame Bichon, came to me. She had taken advantage of Madame's absence to leave her work.

'It is not true, dear, is it?' she asked, laying her hand upon my shoulder.

She was a kind-hearted girl when not under the influence of jealousy.

I pointed to the empty drawer.

'I believe you,' she said, kissing me; 'you English girls don't tell lies. But your coolness is incredible—you have no passion.'

'We are not always cool. When we have suffered a great deal we have no passion for little things.'

'That is what I said. You have suffered a great deal. Ah, it is a hard world, and there is no pity for poor girls who have to work honestly.'

'Yes, it is a hard world,' I said.

'And where are you going to now?' she asked.

'I do not know.'

'Have you no friends?'

I hesitated, for with that feeling of dread and repugnance in my heart could I call Mr. Everleigh my friend?

'Oh, I understand,' she continued; 'you do not want to be helped in that way.'

I shook my head.

'But if you have no money?'

I shrugged my shoulders.

'And you have not any idea of where you are to go, or what you are to do?' she asked.

'No. When I go out of the door I do not know whether I shall turn to the right or the left.'

'Hold,' said she, putting her hand in her pocket. 'You shall share my room until you are able to get one for yourself. There is my key. It is at the corner of the Rue Augustine, the furrier's. You go through the court-yard and upstairs. My room is at the top—like this. There are

two staircases. But the little staircase is being repaired, so you must take the grand stairs past the porter's lodge. He will let you pass if you tell him my name. I shall not be home before nine—there is so much to do—but you will find the lamp all ready, and the fire laid in the stove. And you will make your supper just as if you were at home. When I come home we will have a long talk, and see what is to be done to-morrow. Trouble is not half so hard to bear when one has talked about it well.'

I accepted the kind girl's invitation, and thought it would be nice to talk to her, and tell her what I could of my unhappiness, when night came. She would not wait for me to thank her, but kissing me again, she said she must return to her work before Madame Bichon came back, and so ran downstairs as noiselessly as she had come up.

I found the furrier's at the corner of the Rue Augustine. There was a gateway beyond the shop, leading to an open paved court-yard. It was a large new house. There was an exterior staircase communicating with the covered gallery that on each floor ran round the space occupied by the court-yard. There was a heap of lime in the yard, with some blocks of stone and pieces of iron work; the steps were soiled with the footmarks of workmen. I saw that this was the staircase used by the servants, the tradespeople, and the poorer lodgers. Near it was the porter's lodge. I mentioned Eulalie's name, and the porter, pointing through the door to a wide flight of carpeted stairs, told me to wipe my feet and go up—mademoiselle's room was No. 6, on the fifth story.

I passed along a corridor on the fifth floor, and opened the door marked No. 6. It was a small room, with one window looking on the Rue Augustine; an open door showed the little room used by Eulalie as a kitchen. There was yet another door, which I supposed opened on to the gallery and the outside staircase.

It was getting dusk when someone tapped at this door: I unlocked it, and found a man on the threshold.

'Pardon, mademoiselle,' he said, 'I heard you moving about, and I thought I might just speak a word in case the porter had forgotten to warn you. We've got the ironwork away, and it would not be safe for anyone to go down this way, especially in the dark.'

He pointed behind him as he spoke, and I perceived there was no protection to the narrow gallery on which he stood.

It was nothing to him, accustomed to such dangers, but it made me shudder to think that a slip of the foot, a false step, would throw him headlong to the court-yard below.

I thanked him, and when he was gone, hastily shut the door and turned the key.

I sat by the window until the gas in the streets was lit, and it was too dark to read ; then I lit the lamp, and strove once more to fix my attention on the romance I had picked up. From time to time I looked at the little timepiece on the chimney to see how long it would be before Eulalie came from her work.

It was seven o'clock—there were yet two hours to sit alone—when I heard a quick step in the corridor, and the next moment, without the ceremony of knocking, Mr. Everleigh opened the door and came in.

He panted for breath ; he was more excited than ever I had seen him.

'Doris,' he said, 'put on your hat—there is not a moment to spare. You are discovered ; they have hunted you down—the police.'

'I know it,' I replied ; 'one of them spoke to me yesterday.'

'Who—what sort of a man ?' he asked quickly.

'A man in a check ulster.'

'I thought so—damn him !' he muttered, stamping his foot. 'Quick, quick—your bonnet !'

As he spoke he went to the door, half opened it, and listened.

He turned, and seeing that I had not moved, he cried impatiently :

'Why are you waiting ? Don't you understand ?—you are in danger ; they may be here in another minute. I saw that fellow who spoke to you last night go into Madame Bichon's. A minute earlier he would have met me coming out. You must come with me at once, I tell you.'

I felt that the supreme moment was come. If I yielded to his command and went with him I must accede to all he proposed afterwards. It would be impossible to go back from that. My whole life must be henceforth linked with his. I must be his wife. It was that last reflection that

provoked me to resistance. Every possible evil, weighed against that, was light. I could not, I would not be his wife.

‘Save yourself—leave me here,’ I said.

‘I have told you before,’ he said, ‘I will not go without you.’

‘Then you must share the fate that waits me here,’ I replied firmly.

‘Madness, madness!’ he cried. ‘You have not a penny in the world, you have no prospect but degradation and misery. I offer you an escape from the worst fate that can befall a human creature: a noble life is before you—a life of happiness—the means of saving your soul from eternal perdition.’

‘I cannot accept that life—I will not,’ I answered, animated by an instinctive knowledge that I was doing right in refusing.

‘This is the obstinacy of a fool; I will not listen to it. I am your master; I order you to come. You shall obey!’

He spoke with intense passion; it awed me. I stood trembling, my will faltered—as my physical strength might have given way in a struggle with his.

He had purposely left the door open. At that instant his quick ear caught some distant sound. He passed out of the room and into the corridor.

Relieved for a moment from the terror of his presence, my courage returned, and I strung my nerves to withstand his power to the utmost of my strength.

He came back quickly, shut the door, turned the key in the lock, and shot the little bolt as well.

Then he looked around him in desperation, and catching sight of the other door, he said:

‘That door—where does it lead to?’

‘The gallery over the courtyard, but the——’

‘I thought so. I noticed the staircase as I passed through the court,’ he said, interrupting me with a smile of triumph. ‘Here is your bonnet,’ he added, catching it up. ‘Come!’ and he caught hold of my wrist.

‘No,’ I cried, clutching at the table and drawing back; ‘nothing shall induce me to go. You shall not take me while I have strength to stay here.’

He threw my hand from him with a cry of rage, and folded his arms, looking towards the door, where I now

heard the sound of feet. Suddenly he glanced round the room, and catching sight of an inkstand on the broad window-sill, he went there, at the same time thrusting his hand in his breast-pocket.

He drew out a folded paper, opened it, and wrote with marvellous rapidity.

There was a knock at the door.

'Who's there?' he called in French, still writing.

'Open the door,' answered a voice in English.

'At my convenience,' muttered Mr. Everleigh, dashing off the last word.

'This way, sir, this way!' called the voice without; 'he is in here. I know his voice for all his parleyvoo!'

Mr. Everleigh had turned to me at the table with the paper and a pen; with forced composure, he said:

'I can save you yet. Sign this paper—or come with me.'

I took the pen at once—I would have done anything to escape from him.

The writing was large and plain, although executed with rapidity. These were the words that I saw at a glance:

'I authorize you to pay bearer all that stands to my credit.'

Beneath this I wrote, 'Dorothea.'

'Bromley, *née* Howard,' commanded Mr. Everleigh.

There was no time for discussion. I wrote as I was told, and as quickly as my trembling fingers would move.

Scarcely had I finished when there was a crash at the door, cracking the panel.

Mr. Everleigh took the paper from beneath my hand.

Then a voice beyond the outer door cried:

'Doris, Doris!'

My heart ceased to beat; it was my husband's voice.

I could not answer; I seemed to be paralyzed.

It was but for an instant, for while Valentine's beloved voice was yet ringing in my ears, I heard the sharp click of a key shooting the bolt of a lock, and turning my eyes, I perceived that Mr. Everleigh had opened the door leading to the outer gallery. All was black beyond him.

I screamed loudly with horror—I could not articulate a word to warn him from his fate. It was all instantaneous. I saw him standing with the light upon him against the darkness as the door swung back, and the next moment he strode forward and disappeared.

There was a cry from the black abyss, and then a dull thud.

I fell upon my knees—struck down by the shock of that awful catastrophe.

My cry had been heard, and those without, thinking the harm had come to me, threw themselves against the door. The lock gave way, the door fell back with a crash, and Valentine rushed forward, followed by other men.

He looked round the room wildly ; he could not see me, for the table by which I had fallen came between me and the light.

I could not speak—I crouched there like an inanimate being—I was not strong enough to hold my own against these shocks ; but when, not seeing me, my husband strode towards the open door of the gallery, his danger awoke my faculties. I sprang up, and threw myself in the doorway with one thought in my mind—if he went out by that door he should take me with him, and we would perish together.

That was not to be ; others there knew the danger that lay beyond the door, and laid hands upon him.

But the danger averted from him menaced me. A giddiness seized me—figures swam before my eyes ; I tottered on the threshold, reeled, and knew no more. Valentine it was who saved me, catching me in his powerful arms, and carrying me to a place of safety.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

THE NARRATIVE OF DOROTHEA BROMLEY CONCLUDED.

THE first person I saw as I opened my eyes on recovering consciousness was Mr. Schlobach.

‘It is all right, it is all right!’ he cried, his face beaming with delight.

Then I looked upwards and saw my dear husband, for he was supporting me in his arms as I lay on the little bed, and I flung my arms round his neck, and buried my face in his breast, crying, ‘Valentine ! my husband ! Valentine !’ forgetting in the joy of finding him alive that I was not his wife.

He would have lifted my face to kiss me ; but I was

ashamed, knowing that I had willed his death, and turned my eyes away.

'No, no,' I said; 'I sent him to kill you. The shot he aimed at your heart was at my direction.'

'He fired no shot at me, Doris,' said Valentine. 'It was not that way he struck at my heart. He told you a lie to get you into his power and take you away from me, my darling,' and, saying that, he forcibly lifted my face to his and kissed it.

But I resisted still, for now the memory of his offence against me returned. I released myself from his arms and went to Mr. Schlobach, and, standing beside him, I looked at Valentine for a moment in silence and sorrow, wondering how one who looked so noble could be base to me.

'Thank Heaven! my guilty wish was not executed,' I said, my voice quivering on my trembling lips. 'I am glad you live, Valentine; there is no wish for vengeance in my heart now.' Then, turning to my dear old guardian, I said: 'You know all, you forgive me; we will go away together—not to the old house, but where I am not known.'

'I will not take you away from this room,' cried the professor stoutly, though the tears in his eyes belied the sternness of his words. 'Till Valentine has forgiven you I will not speak—not speak to you again;' and he could scarcely say that for the emotion that choked him.

'What am I to believe?' I asked in amaze.

'Anything but the lies of that infernal villain who calls himself Everleigh.'

'It is not for you to ask forgiveness,' said Valentine. 'I would not have had you do otherwise than you have done, seeing what you saw, hearing what you heard. It is for me to explain, and to ask forgiveness for a want of confidence in you.'

'What happened on that night at Chislehurst I have learnt from the confession of the lodge-keeper, who was paid by Everleigh to connive in misleading you.'

'The lady you saw at my table, and acting the part of my wife, is my sister——'

'Mrs. Norman?'

'Mrs. Norman. To escape from her husband she took refuge in the house at Chislehurst on the eve of our return, and there assumed the character of my wife. For her sake

I kept up that deception, knowing that her husband was in the neighbourhood. I thought it best to keep this a secret from you then, for I was under a promise to my mother to conceal the fact that Edith is her daughter.'

I would not listen to any further explanations, but throwing myself into Valentine's arms, I sobbed and cried against his breast, which was the only way in which I could then show my contrition and appeal for pardon ; then my weeping turned to hysterical laughter, as I thought of being jealous of Edith, Valentine's sister. I longed to repair the injury I had done her in my heart, and then, thinking of her danger, I said :

'But is she not still in danger? What has become of her husband, Dr. Norman?'

'His fate, you know. Dr. Norman and Mr. Everleigh are one and the same person.'

I was overcome with amazement, and trembled at the recollection of the danger I had escaped in refusing his hypocritical scheme of missionary work.

'But,' I asked wonderingly, 'what can have been his motive in hazarding so much?'

'I would hazard more for the love of you,' said Valentine.

'But it was not the love of you that inspired him,' said my guardian ; 'a man is better for such a love as that. It was your fortune he was in love with, and no man was ever the better for being in love with money that does not belong to him.'

About that time the young man who called himself Peters, but whose actual name was Thomas Craik, ran into the room, breathless with excitement, and said to Valentine, who stepped aside to meet him :

'He is dead, sir, down in the yard there—dead—with the paper in his hand, signed by Mrs. Bromley. The police won't let me have it.'

The paper that he had made me sign was the letter stolen from the cottage—the letter from my father which entitled me to a quarter of a million of money.

We stayed in Brussels until the police inquiry respecting the death of Dr. Norman was finished, and my father's letter, which had been the cause of so much unhappiness.

and had brought Dr. Norman to that terrible end, was given up to me.

We did not forget the kindness of the two girls who had befriended me; Valentine and I enabled them to open a little business for themselves.

On landing at Dover we were met by Mrs. Norman and Dr. Bullen, who had come to London during the search for me—Valentine having telegraphed at once to him to know if I had returned to the old cottage at Faulcondale—and had stayed at Chislehurst after Valentine's departure to take care of Mrs. Norman.

And we all went to Woldhurst—to my real home !

I must not forget to tell that this happy conclusion to all my troubles was in a great measure due to the ingenuity and ability of Thomas Craik, who had traced Dr. Norman and me to Ostend, thence to Antwerp, and back to Brussels. It was he who had spoken to me that evening in the street, and whom, with Valentine, I had seen in the great square. In recognition of his services Valentine settled an annuity upon him, which has enabled him to live very comfortably in the country, where he has developed a strong taste for sport, and keeps a fast-trotting pony. We expected that he would marry Esther Norton, who had a certain kind of cleverness like his, and was seemingly very fond of him. But he told Valentine that two of a trade would not agree, and married Eliza, the good, red-cheeked little maid who had served us at Faulcondale.

Mr. Schlobach lives near us also; scarcely a day passes without a visit from him.

It is always pleasant to us women to talk about marriage, and so it pleases me to tell that the kind old clergyman, Dr. Bullen, has lately made Mrs. Norman his wife, and has exchanged his living at Orwell for one in Kent, so that we often have the pleasure of seeing him and his still young wife.

I should like to say something about my own happiness, but I find it the most difficult task of all, for the little events

that may vary the even current of our joy, marking its course with sparkling delight, would need a finer hand than mine to render justly. I have three children; their birth is not amongst the small events.

Have I shed a tear—has my heart ached since I came home with my beloved husband? Not once, save when memory dwelt upon the days of our separation.

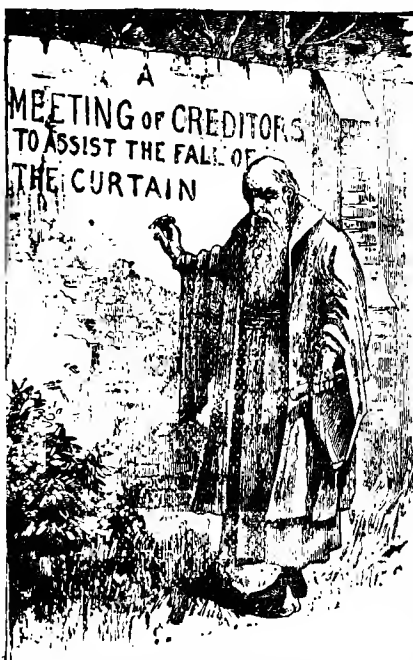
The story of those terrible days is a remarkable one. I was talking about it this afternoon to Dr. Bullen.

‘When I first heard it I could scarcely believe it possible,’ said he; then he added in his careful, grave, and sententious manner, ‘and I am not the first who has hesitated to accept the truth because it is strange, nor shall I be the last; for it is in the nature of us, being imperfect, to discredit matters outside the limited scope of our own observations; which is, nevertheless, a fault which we should endeavour to correct, for otherwise we stand in danger of becoming materialists, as I have more than once pointed out to my congregation in my sermons on miracles.’

THE END.

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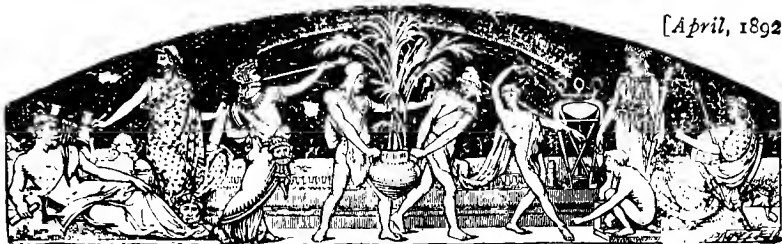
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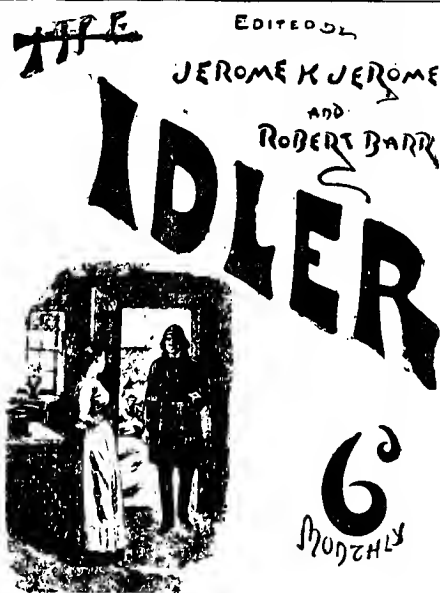
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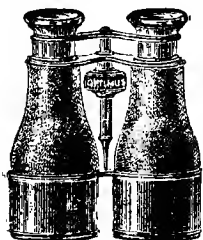
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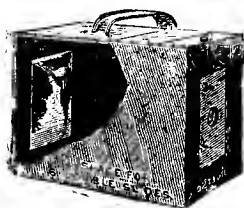
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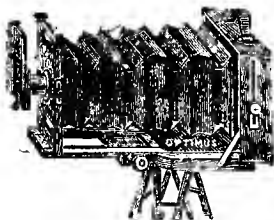
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